

# Prescription: Murder! Volume 1

Authentic Cases From The Files of Alan Hynd

ALAN HYND

Hero  
Again





# Annotation

From the files and pen of world renowned true crime writer Alan Hynd (1903–1974) comes a deliciously dark sampling of some of the most fascinating true murder cases of the first half of the 20th Century. These stories, the first of three short collections, are unified by a single theme: they all involve physicians. And not for the autopsy, but as perpetrators or accused perpetrators. You may never see your family care giver again in the same light.

Told in the characteristic wry, anecdotal reportorial style that made Alan Hynd famous in his day (two wartime best sellers in 1943, contributions to The Reader's Digest, Colliers, Coronet, The Saturday Evening Post, True, Liberty, The American Mercury and almost every true detective magazine in print) these tales will have you cringing one minute, laughing the next, and gasping in shock a moment later. Truly, no one could make up classics like these. Take for example, the murder ring of South Philadelphia in which a faith healer and two Lotharios helped restless wives rid themselves of abusive unwanted husbands...or the respected French war hero who was a pillar of the community by day but prowled brothels and music halls by night and was caught with a cadaver sealed within the walls of his home....or the traveling physician who married a farmer's ex-wife and had four step-sons, then three, then two, then...

And finally, as a bonus track, relax and savor the wickedly evil doings of "Sister Amy Archer" at the Archer convalescent home in Connecticut, where old folks checked out just a little too quickly for comfort. The events eventually became the basis of "Arsenic and Old Lace," the hit play and iconic movie.

As the old adages go, you couldn't make this stuff up... and true crime is always farther out there than fiction.

*(With illustrations)*

- **Prescription: Murder!**

- Introduction
- The Case of the South Philly Slaughterers
- The Case of the Philandering Family Doctor
- The Case of The Traveling Doctor and the Farmer's Wife
- The Case of The Jekyll-Hyde Sawbones
- THE CASE OF ARSENIC, OLD LACE AND SISTER AMY ARCHER
- Also by Noel Hynd in E-book format

**Prescription: Murder!**  
**Volume 1 of 3**  
**By Alan Hynd with Noel Hynd**

*“Murder is like potato chips: you  
can’t stop with just one.”*

*— Stephen King, Under the  
Dome*

# Introduction

My father, Alan Hynd (1903–1974) was one of the foremost true crime writers of his day. Over a career that spanned almost fifty years, he wrote close to two dozen published books, probably more than a thousand magazine articles, several radio and TV shows and a couple of films. It was not a bad life's work — it was just mostly about bad people.

He had a style, which was more anecdotal than scholarly, more entertaining than academic. A keen sense of humor, sometimes very dark, was never lost on the events, and was almost always conveyed in his reporting. ***Prescription: Murder!*** is a small sampling of some of his more memorable articles, classics in the annals of true crime. This collection is about doctors who killed, for example. There are four episodes about doctors and then a bonus track about a nursing home. This is stuff that just couldn't be invented. Where possible, I've included illustrations from the eras of the story. They are all in the public domain.

I have gone through all of these stories and re-edited them for modern audiences. In some cases, I made small additions, adding information that may have come to light on these cases in the forty years since my father died. I've retained his jaundiced outlook on the cases he wrote about, and kept his style. I like to think I have done it in a manner that would have pleased him. Hence I added my name as a writer here more than an editor. In the final years of his life, I ghosted several articles for him. So I can think of no one more qualified than myself to tinker.

A final note: The dialogue in several of these articles is closer to the truth than one might think. All of it was taken from court proceedings of the era, credible newspaper accounts and actual confessions, then “cleaned up” a bit.

Alan Hynd's stories, which appeared in publications from, *The Reader's Digest* and *The Saturday Evening Post* to *True Detective*, had thousands of fans in their day. Thanks to the accessibility of electronic publishing, it is never too late to become one.

If you like true crime, or just a crazy jaw-dropping story, this is probably for you. Enjoy.

Noel Hynd

September 2014

Los Angeles, California

# The Case of the South Philly Slaughterers

*...in which a homicidal threesome made accidents pay.*

The trouble with Doctor Morris Bolber, who functioned as a faith healer in the Italian section of South Philadelphia back in the Terrible Thirties, was that he could never quite bring himself to have much faith in the theory that murder will out. This attitude of the discerning doctor sprang in part from conditions right in his own neighborhood. Bolber, whose ear was never very far from the ground, was aware of three instances wherein ladies, for various reasons, had poisoned their spouses.

The Philadelphia Police Department, without realizing it, or in fact caring much, was lending an assist to this shocking state of affairs. The Department in the Thirties was honey-combed by grafters from City Hall down to the flatfeet on the beat with the result that many honest cops were usually so preoccupied by worry over getting the rug pulled from under them that they didn't notice what was going on among the citizens. Thus a murderer who was sly enough not to throw his victim out with the garbage or appear in the New Year's Day Mummers Parade with somebody's head stuck to a broomstick, stood in a fair way to go unmolested indefinitely. And, for a man who was *really* clever, the field of pre-meditated homicide offered opportunity practically beyond limit.

All of that raises the curtain on one of the strangest episodes ever in the history of American homicide. Let's consider the three main players, a pair of cousins named Herman and Paul Petrillo and their associate, one Dr. Morris Bolber.

Herman Petrillo was born in 1899 in the province of Campania, near Naples. He came to the United States in 1910 and first worked as a barber. Then he found more profitable ways to make money: his schemes first consisted of arson and insurance fraud. Eventually, however, he came across a small Philadelphia gang selling counterfeit five-dollar bills for half the face value. Petrillo bought in, learned the business, so to speak, and was printing his own.

Herman Petrillo's cousin, Paul Petrillo, also landed in Philadelphia in 1910. He married shortly after his arrival in the States and opened a tailor shop, Paul Petrillo, Custom Tailor to the Classy Dressers, on East Passyunk Avenue. The business was successful for many years. Then along came the Depression and no one was buying new threads. So Paul the Tailor was on the rocks financially. Soon thereafter, he got into the life insurance racket. He sold cheap policies:

weekly premiums were 50 cents or a dollar. The insurance company he worked with was a fly by night outfit that never had any intention of making a big payout. It also did not require a medical examination of the insured. So Paul Petrillo would sell policies mostly to sick and injured middle-aged men. A good deed, you think? Think again. Petrillo had his own game plan. He was working with immigrants, don't forget, people who were often illiterate in English. So Petrillo would list himself on the policy without the policyholder's knowledge, often making himself the sole beneficiary. At first, Petrillo was playing a numbers game and hoping for a hit in the form of a death of someone that he had insured. Later on, things would take a darker turn.

Paul Petrillo also had a side interest, stemming from legends he had heard as a boy in Italy: faith healers. A superstitious man, he was also fascinated by magic; particularly as it was practiced by men who claimed the power to take away a person's pain. Through this interest, and prowling through the nether regions of South Philadelphia, Petrillo came across a middle-aged man known in the neighborhood as Louie the Rabbi.

Louis was actually a Russian Jewish immigrant named Morris Bolber. Bolber had been raised by his grandparents in a small village near Moscow. He was a child prodigy, entering Grodno State University at age nine and graduating at twelve. He then became interested in the Kabbalah as well as other ancient books of magic and mysticism. His fascination morphed into a fixation. In 1905 he traveled to China and sought out a legendary sorceress. Bolber lived with the old woman for five years, then immigrated to New York City in 1911, calling himself "Dr." now, following his education in China. He married and settled on the lower East side. He worked as a teacher, saved his money earnestly, and ran a grocery store. For many years, he led a normal life.



Then came the Depression. His business failed. Bolber packed up his wife and family and moved to Philadelphia. But now he had an inspiration: He sent out handbills announcing his new practice as a faith healer.

So by the mid-1930's, Paul Petrillo had met the man known as Dr. Morris Bolber. Through Paul, Bolber met Cousin Herman. And so there they were, the counterfeiter, the insurance guy and the fake doctor. Things were reader to roll.

By the year 1932, Doctor Bolber was in nasty financial straits once again. The pickings in the faith healing field had been slim since the Great Depression of 1929. The faith healer's patients had either lost faith in him or couldn't afford to be healed.

So the doctor, as he was called, with a wife and a houseful of offspring to support, had gone into a side business: selling bottles of stale ginger ale spiked with saltpeter to women whose husbands had strayed from the connubial couch. The saltpeter had slowed down the husbands but it hadn't slowed down a parade of creditors to the doctor's domicile and office, in a faded-red brick house on the corner of Ninth Street and Moyamensing Avenue, in the heart of the Quaker City's Italian district. One morning in February 1932, Bolber was in a state of acute depression as he sat in a gloomy front room that he used for professional purposes, against a background of scuffed leather volumes on abracadabra, while a howling wind rattled the windowpanes. The faith healer looked somewhat in-congruous in such

a setting, for he was an affluent-looking little man of 42, neatly barbered, alert of eye and sharply turned out. As he sat there in his office, railing at the fates, somebody pulled the bell at the front door.

Bolber rushed to a window to see whether it was friend or foe: patient or creditor. The caller was a new patient, a moderately attractive woman of about 30, the wife of a man named Anthony Giacobbe, who ran a dry-goods store. She had come to get a bottle of that stuff she had been hearing about, the stuff that slowed men down. Mrs. Giacobbe told Bolber that her husband was spending so much time and money on drink and other women that he was letting his business go to pot.

"We're even having a hard time keeping up his insurance," said Mrs. Giacobbe. "Insurance?" said Bolber, all ears. "How much insurance does your husband carry?"

"Ten thousand dollars' worth."

Doctor Bolber was visited by an inspiration. He gave Mrs. Giacobbe a bottle of stale ginger ale spiked not with saltpeter but with an aphrodisiac strong enough to transform a broken-down wreck into a howling wolf.

"Come back in a couple of weeks," said the doctor, "and let me know if this has any effect on your husband." As soon as Mrs. Giacobbe left, Bolber, according to an admission he was one day to make to the cops, had an inspiration. He hustled around the corner to the hole-in-the-wall tailor shop run by his friend, Paul Petrillo.

Petrillo, a chubby man in his thirties, with heavily greased black hair and the smell of Sen Sen on his breath, had for some time been collaborating in a unique arrangement with the faith healer. Petrillo made free suits for Doctor Bolber in return for the names of women married to men who were neglecting their homework.

Petrillo was one day to be revealed in a courtroom as a gentleman with phenomenal amorous powers. This particular day, when the fraudulent faith healer slipped the wolfish tailor the name of Mrs. Millie Giacobbe, something new had been added. Petrillo was not only to seduce the lady; he was to pretend to fall in love with her and propose marriage.

"But what about the husband?" Petrillo asked.

"Never mind about him," said Bolber.

"Just get the wife nuts about you and I'll take care of the husband."

"How?"

"I'll kill him."

"But why knock the guy off, Doc?" asked Petrillo. "What's the angle?"

"Insurance. He's got \$10,000 worth of insurance. We can get half

of it from the wife. That'll give us \$2,500 apiece."

Petrillo was all for it. In 1932, \$2,500 was a bundle.

"How you gain' to knock the guy off, Doc?"

"Poison," said Bolber. "I got a poison that'll fool any doctor."

"What's the name of it?"

The substance Bolber had in mind was conium, a lethal herb known to the layman as hemlock, the stuff that was in the mickey that did in Socrates, the Greek philosopher, in

500 B.C. The attractive feature of conium, which was easily disguised in food and drink, was that when it was administered to a patient suffering from any one of a wide variety of diseases it caused the ailment to worsen materially. Making things even more convenient in the Giacobbe household, the man of the house was a chronic drunk. It would be easy to slip something into his beverage.

Next morning Petrillo sprayed himself with cologne and, posing as an encyclopedia salesman, called on Mrs. Giacobbe after her philandering husband had left for his place of business. In a couple of weeks, Mrs. Giacobbe called on the faith healer again. The stuff that he had given her to slow down her husband had had no effect.

"But I don't care," said Mrs. Giacobbe. "I've met somebody else."

"And you're in love with him?"

"Yes."

Bolber sat in his office half the night writing a dramatic act, complete with instructions for gestures, by which Petrillo was to propose marriage to Mrs. Giacobbe. Next day, after Giacobbe, the marked man, was away at business, Petrillo called on the wife. On bended knee, he professed his undying love for the lady.

"Let's get married and run away some-where," he said, beating his chest.

"But what about my husband?" asked Mrs. Giacobbe.

"Something could happen to him."

Mrs. Giacobbe had never thought of such a happy eventuality.

"What could happen?" She asked.

"We could take all his clothes off when he comes home drunk some night and he could get pneumonia from layin' there naked with the cold wind blowin' right on him."

A few nights later Bolber was sitting in his office listening to Petrillo relating the happy developments.

"Giacobbe didn't go to work today," the tailor was telling the faith healer. "Me and his wife stripped him when he come home drunk last night. He woke up with an awful cold this morning."

Mrs. Giacobbe had gotten her husband thoroughly starched again that night.

"So we stripped him again a little while ago," Petrillo went on.

"The weatherman says it's gonna be down to ten above tonight. When Giacobbe wakes up tomorrow morning he ought to be practical blue."

The next night Petrillo reported to Bolber that Giacobbe had contracted pneumonia. The family doctor had been called and had prescribed two kinds of liquid medicine.

"Good," said the faith healer. "Tell Mrs. Giacobbe to come around with that medicine."

The patient quickly began to come apart at the seams. The bona fide doctor wasn't surprised.

"Your husband was a heavy drinker," he explained sadly to Mrs. Giacobbe. "Heavy drinkers often fail to survive pneumonia."

"My poor Antonio," said Mrs. Giacobbe, warming up to the idea of an early widowhood.

After the funeral, Bolber sent for the widow. There would be a fee, he explained, for his doctoring up that medicine, a fee of half that insurance money. Mrs. Giacobbe, not too bright and happy to be rid of her faithless spouse so that she could marry the ardent tailor, willingly forked over the five grand in cash.

It wasn't long before Mrs. Giacobbe appeared in Bolber's office greatly distraught. Petrillo had banked his romantic fires. The doctor made a ticking sound and shook his head sadly. The male animal was an unpredictable beast. There was nothing, he feared, he could do to help the lady.

One night, after office hours, the faith healer suggested to Petrillo that they get busy on another husband. Where, Petrillo asked, would they find a man carrying enough in-surance to make the enterprise worthwhile?

"We'll insure somebody ourselves," said Bolber. The doctor had already been thinking about his own patients. He went to his card file and selected one.

"Now here's a woman named Lorenzo whose husband is a roofer. We could insure the husband for say \$10,000, with double indemnity in case of an accident, and then get him pushed off a roof."

How, Petrillo inquired, would they get Lorenzo insured without his knowing it? And who would push him off the roof? Bolber ignored the questions.

"Your cousin," he said to Petrillo. "The one that was pinched a couple of years ago for counterfeiting."

"Oh, you mean Little Herman. Herman Petrillo."

"That's the fellow. He used to be an amateur actor, didn't he?"

"Yeah, before the Secret Service pinched him for that bum money. He used to act in church plays."

"What's he doing now?"

"He's a spaghetti salesman."

“Get him here,” said the faith healer.

Herman Petrillo, the once-and-future counterfeiter, was a foxy-looking toy man given to loud checked suits and overcoats with belts in the back. Doctor Bolber decided that Little Herman would blend perfectly into his scheme. Bolber explained to Little Herman that he was to pose as Lorenzo, the roofer, in taking out an insurance policy. Then, after the policy was issued, Herman would shove the real Lorenzo off a roof. Little Herman, a real stinker, was simply mad about the plot.

Paul Petrillo, carefully coached by Bolber, assumed the role of a canvasser and called at Lorenzo’s home one day when Lorenzo was up on a roof in a distant part of the city. A few weeks after laying the groundwork, Paul asked Mrs. Lorenzo if she would marry him.

The lady said she would be glad to except that she was already married.

“But supposin’ something should happen to your husband,” said Petrillo.

“Like what?” asked the seduced wife.

“Like him fallin’ off a roof.” Mrs. Lorenzo, who caught on quickly, liked the idea. Now Doctor Bolber instructed Little Herman to telephone to the Philadelphia offices of the Prudential Insurance Company, palm himself off as Lorenzo, and ask that a salesman come to the Lorenzo home the next day at noon, when the real Lorenzo would be up on a roof somewhere.

When the salesman called, there was Mrs. Lorenzo, the faithless wife, and Little Herman, the stand-in husband, look-ing for all the world like what they weren’t, applying for a \$10,000 policy with double indemnity for accidental death. And they had cash in hand to pay for the first quarterly premium.

A Prudential doctor called the following day, found Her-man to be a sound actuarial risk, and in due time the policies arrived in the mail. Mrs. Lorenzo intercepted them. Doctor Bolber began to follow the real Lorenzo around, the better to spot some plausible way of striking up an acquaint-anceship with the man. He fell into conversation with the roofer in a bar one night. Thus he discovered that Lorenzo was mad for dirty French post cards. Doctor Bolber acquired a supply of the French art and gave the stuff to Little Herman. Late one afternoon Little Herman buttonholed Lorenzo when the marked man came down off a roof and sold him some cards.

“Get a hold of me any time you got more of this stuff,” Lorenzo told Herman. Doctor Bolber, too cagey to be hasty, allowed a few months to elapse before giving Little Herman the nod to take care of Lorenzo. But finally Little Herman appeared on a roof that Lorenzo was repairing solo. He had a new batch of French post cards for the

roofer.

"Gee," said Lorenzo, "these are pippins. How much?"

The question was to remain unanswered. Little Herman, looking around to make sure nobody was observing him, gave the actuarial risk a shove and in a twinkling Lorenzo was plunging eight stories to the street.

Six months passed before Doctor Bolber summoned Little Herman again. "You ever go fishin'?" Bolber asked.

No, Little Herman didn't know anything about fishing.

Bolber told him to bone up on the sport and to buy himself some tackle.

"We've found a man by the name of Fierenza who got \$5,000 in double indemnity already," the faith healer said. "He fishes every Saturday afternoon in the Schuylkill River. Your cousin is going to make love to his wife."

One fine Saturday afternoon, when Fierenza was about to go out in a rented rowboat, who just happened along but Little Herman. Actor that he was, Little Herman, carrying bait and tackle and wearing hip boots and a battered hat bright with artificial flies, looked more like a fisherman than a real fisherman.

"You goin' out in that there boat alone?" Little Herman asked Fierenza.

"Yeah," said Fierenza. "How about me and you sharin' the boat and we'll split the expense," suggested Little Herman. The diminutive fiend patted his hip pocket. "I got a bottle with me, too."

Out on the water, in a sheltered cover where nobody could see them, Little Herman asked Fierenza if he could swim.

"No," said Fierenza.

"Not a stroke?"

"Look," said Fierenza, "if I went overboard I'd be drowned."

"Hey," said Little Herman a few sips of booze later, pointing to something behind Fierenza. "What's that?"

"What's what?"

"There. *Behind* you!" Fierenza turned and there was a shove, a scream and a splash.

Little Herman, who could swim better than a lot of fish, dived off the other side of the boat. Then, good and wet, he climbed back in the boat again and rowed ashore. There he acted the role of a heart-broken friend.

"It's all my fault," he said. "I should have saved him."

With three victims, Giacobbe, the dry-goods merchant, Lorenzo, the roofer, and Fierenza, the fisherman, disposed of within a year and a half, for an over-all take of \$25,000, Doctor Bolber saw nothing ahead but a golden future. Many of the immigrant women who would

be there clients had burdensome abusive husbands with whom they had been stuck with back in Italy. Since most were practicing Catholics, divorce was not an option. Thus Bolber and his two associates were selling a product that had a certain appeal. Similarly, most people in South Philadelphia knew better than to go to the police.

"There's no telling," Bolber said to the Petrillo cousins while the three sat around the faith healer's office over a jug of Chianti one night in the summer of 1933, "where a thing like this could end. Why, we could establish branches all over the country — like Household Finance."

Doctor Bolber, having his ear to the ground, had gotten a rumble about a most remarkable woman in North Philadelphia, a woman named Maria (or Carina) Favato who was known in her own bailiwick as the Witch. The Witch, who was a widow, was in the same profession as Doctor Bolber: faith healing, saltpeter and general mumbo jumbo.

The Witch, who was a widow, was in the business of getting rid of unwanted husbands for wives. Not for insurance money, but just to get rid of the men. This impressed Bolber as a wanton waste of golden opportunity and that was why, on one hot summer night, he journeyed across town to converse with Mrs. Favato.

One look at the Witch convinced Doctor Bolber why she had taken on that appellation. The woman, in her early forties, was strictly out of a bad dream: short, squat, with a hooked nose and a face that reminded Bolber of a batch of fresh dough with two currants for eyes. The Witch, it developed, had heard of Bolber and so, since the two immediately understood each other, they dispensed with the preliminaries and began to talk shop.

What, Bolber inquired, did the Witch use to poison errant husbands?

"Best stuff is arsenic," said the Witch. "What you usin'?"

"Conium."

"What that?"

"It's from the carrot family. It's also known as hemlock. It's what they used to poison Socrates with," Bolber said.

"Who?"

"Socrates."

"Philadelphia man?" the Witch inquired.

"Not exactly," said Bolber.

Doctor Bolber asked the Witch if she was married.

"Had five husbands," said the Witch. "Poisoned three."

"And did you collect insurance on the ones you poisoned?" Bolber inquired pleasantly.

The Witch nodded. Now Bolber explained how simple it was to collect insurance on the husbands of other women. The Witch was fascinated and craved details. Bolber supplied them.

“Jesus,” said the Witch. “Look all the money I coulda made if I’d thunk of that.”

Bolber patted the Witch’s hand. “Never mind,” he assured her. “We’ll make up for lost time.”

The Witch went to *her* card file. A hapless janitor named Dominic Petrino emerged from the file as a sound prospect. Petrino’s wife had been buying saltpeter from the Witch for some time without appreciable results. The faith healer explained to the Witch that Paul Petrillo, the wolfish tailor, would romance the janitor’s wife and condition her for the plot. Then Little Herman would pose as the janitor for the benefit of the insurance people and when the real janitor was bumped off the Witch would be cut in on the take.

“Good,” said the Witch. “While you doin’ that I be lookin’ for more husbands.”

After Paul Petrillo had set things up in the Petrino home, Little Herman, the actor, hovered in the wings, ready to go on stage and essay one of his finest roles. One day when the real janitor was at work, Little Herman, dressed like a janitor, and smelling like one, sat around the Petrino flat with the faithless wife when a salesman for the Prudential Life Insurance Company called.

Herman said he would like to take out a \$10,000 policy with double indemnity. The salesman, although as fee happy as the average policy peddler, inquired how a janitor could keep up the payments on such a big policy.

Doctor Bolber, the sly one, had prepared well in advance for that very question. He had fixed up a couple of fake bankbooks that made it appear that the janitor had \$12,000 in savings.

“Me and my wife here turn over houses,” Little Herman explained, meaning that the couple dabbled in real estate. That made everything all right.

It was two days later, when a doctor for the Prudential called to give the stand-in applicant a physical examination, that Little Herman had a few bad moments. This same doctor had examined Little Herman more than a year before, when Little Herman had posed as the husband of Lorenzo, the doomed roofer.

“Haven’t I seen you someplace before?” asked the doctor.

“Never seen you in my life, Doc,” said Little Herman.

“But I could swear that I’ve examined you for insurance before.”

“You couldn’t of, Doc. I ain’t never taken no out insurance before.” The doctor ascribed the whole thing to a case of mistaken identity, examined Little Herman, found him a sound actuarial risk,

and the policy was issued.

A few months passed. Then Doctor Bolber gave the nod for the end of the real janitor. Petrino worked in a tenement house. The faith healer handed Little Herman a monkey wrench, instructed him to pose as an inspector for the gas company, sneak up behind Petrino when the janitor was at the top of a flight of steep stairs, and crown him with the wrench.

"It'll look," Bolber explained, "like that janitor just fell down the stairs and fractured his skull."

One night, a couple of weeks later, Doctor Bolber again crossed the city to pay another visit to the Witch. He handed her five hundred dollars for her cut of the Petrino take. "Who else you got for us?" he asked.

The Witch had a fishmonger named Luigi Primavera. It was the same evil story all over again, with Paul Petrillo romanc-ing the wife and Little Herman Petrillo standing in for the doomed man. But this time there was a new twist. Doctor Bolber, warming up to his work, decided to take a more personal hand in mat-ters. "I'm going to kill this man Primavera personally," he in-formed the Petrillo cousins

"How, Doc?" asked Little Herman. "I'm going to run over him with an automobile," said the faith healer. So one rainy day, while Primavera was hawking fish on a lonely street in South Philly, Doctor Bolber, at the wheel of a car with a souped-up motor and fake license plates, waited until the victim left his wagon to knock on some doors. Then the doctor stepped on the gas, ran up on a sidewalk and sent poor Primavera and his fish flying.

Late that night, the doctor sat in his office reading the early editions of the morning papers. The papers carried the story of the hit-and-runner who had killed the fishmonger. Some people living on the street where the fatality had occurred had told the cops that the driver of the car, whose description fitted that of Bolber, had apparently been deliberate in run-ning Primavera down.

The faith healer sat in his office most of that night, drinking and thinking. Just as daylight was peeping through the blinds in his office he reached a momentous decision. Henceforth he would eschew accidental deaths in favor of natural ones. True, a natural death paid only half the insurance money that a double indemnity one did, but it was less likely to excite sus-picion.

Next Doctor Bolber was visited by an inspiration that was to prove a bright milestone in the history of premeditated homicide. He decided that a canvas bag, filled with about twenty pounds of sand, would, if brought down properly on a man's head, render the victim temporarily unconscious. Repeated ad-ditional blows would induce a cerebral hemorrhage and a sand bag would leave no outward traces of

having been applied.

Doctor Bolber's sandbag technique proved just as success-ful as he predicted it would be. For three solid years, from 1934 to 1937, Paul and Little Herman Petrillo, working stealthily under the faith healer's supervision, traveled through-out the Quaker City, respectively romancing wives and sand-bagging sleeping husbands. And by now, a new twist had been added. With the assistance of The Witch in North Philly, some of the recent widows were now being primped for re-marriage...with the intention of taking out new insurance policies on their new husbands and then arranging for their lucrative demise.

The Witch proved to be a most valuable scout for the satanic doctor.

By January of 1937, some five years after Mrs. Anthony Giacobbe had first appeared in Doctor Bolber's crummy office asking for some saltpeter for her errant spouse, the faith healer had given the nod for an estimated fifty killings. By now Bolber's faded-red brick home at the corner of Ninth Street and Moyamensing Avenue had taken on a new look by an expensive mid-town decorating outfit.

The Petrillo boys were also doing splendidly at the bank and chasing around town in expensive automobiles. The Witch, who was a baseball fan devoted to the fortunes of the local Philadelphia Athletics, was to be seen regu-larly in a field box at Shibe Park, eating hot dogs by the half dozen, spilling mustard on expensive satin dresses, and invok-ing the wrath of the nether regions on the players of visiting clubs.

Everybody was fat and rich. But were they happy? You're damned right they were!

So far as the Philadelphia Police Department went, Doctor Bolber might very well have still been sitting there in his office in South Philly for several decades beyond the Thirties, giving the lethal nod to the Petrillo boys. Only one cop in the entire department — a smart and honest dick by the name of Sam Ricardo — got a whiff of what was going on.

Ricardo, like Doctor Bolber, was a fellow who kept an ear to the ground. Thus, in the early months of 1937, he heard the first faint rumbles of a murder-for-insurance ring at work. Ricardo didn't hear any names, just that there were, and had been for some time, some not-so-brotherly goings on in the City of Brotherly Love.

Detective Ricardo went to his superiors and asked to be as-signed to investigate the rumors he had heard. His superiors looked at Ricardo as if the man were not quite bright. So Ricardo was assigned to some pedestrian investigations while Doctor Bolber continued on his satanic way.

It was in a jail house, of all places, where something de-veloped

that was, in the final analysis, to trip up Doctor Bol-ber. There was a fellow named George Meyer, not a bad soul, who was doing a stretch in a workhouse for a minor offense. Meyer put his time in durance vile to good advantage by invent-ing a cheap cleaning fluid. So when he was about to get out of the can in the spring of 1937, he asked a fellow con if the con knew of anybody on the outside who might be able to finance the cleaning fluid so that George Meyer could get it on the market and make a legal living. Meyer also had an upholstery business.

“Yeah,” said the fellow con. “Look up a guy by the name of Herman Petrillo. He’s got all kinds of dough.”

Meyer went and met with Petrillo. Little Herman only half listened as George Meyer expounded the prospects for his cleaning fluid.

“I ain’t inarrested in nothin’ like that,” said Little Herman. “But tell you what. You go out and dig up a guy we can get insurance on and knock off and I’ll cut you in on it.”

George Meyer asked for more details. Little Herman, thinking he was safe talking to a recently released convict, supplied the details. Meyer, still playing it straight, said he’d think it over. Meyer, who wanted no part of a return to incarceration, went to the police where eventually he met with Detective Ricardo. Riccardo, seeing a winning hand when he was dealt one, moved Meyer to the office of the U.S. Secret Service, the federal agency that investigates counterfeiting, and offer them his assistance. Ricardo knew Petrillo was a counterfeiter and guessed the feds might be interested in what George Meyer had to say.

They were.

Three months earlier, a man named Ferdinando Alfonsi, 38, had died under mysterious circumstances. A bright up-and-coming assistant district attorney named Vincent McDevitt, who would later become the D.A., himself, had drawn the case from his boss, amidst rumors about various murder-for-profit cases in Philadelphia. But the investigation had gone nowhere. But now, acting on Meyer’s snitch, a Secret Service agent, known only as Agent Landvoight, working undercover under an alias, visited the District Attorney’s office and soon landed in the office of McDevitt.

Landvoight told McDevitt that he had an informer, Meyer, who had told him of a group of men and women based in Philadelphia who ran a murder ring to collect insurance money. Involved in the ring was one Herman Petrillo. Landvoight was already familiar with Petrillo. He had tried for years to arrest him for counterfeiting, but every time the authorities served a warrant Petrillo outfoxed them.

Meyer had told Landvoight that Petrillo had offered him \$500 in

legal tender and \$2,500 in counterfeit bills, if Meyer could organize a hit on a man named Ferdinando Alfonsi. He then handed him an 18-inch piece of pipe.

“Do it in his home,” Petrillo said. “Bash him with the pipe. Then carry him up the steps and throw him down. It’ll look like an accident. Got it?”

Meyer had no intention of carrying out the crime, but played along hoping that Petrillo would offer money. Petrillo would not pony up a nickel up front. In the end, Meyer scored some cash by selling the information to the Secret Service.

Understandably, Landvoight was more interested in the counterfeit bills than he was in any murder conspiracy. He offered to keep on paying Meyer if he would continue to play along with Petrillo’s scheme. The down and out businessman had little choice and reluctantly agreed.

Agent Landvoight arranged for Stanley Phillips, a street-wise agent of the Secret Service, to work with Meyer. On August 1, 1938, Meyer and Phillips met with Herman Petrillo at a local diner. Petrillo was uncomfortable discussing the plans in public, so the three men went out to the street and sat in his car. Meyer introduced Phillips as Johnny Phillips, a friend of his that was fresh out of prison after serving time for murder.

Herman Petrillo liked the pedigree. The conversation soon turned to Alfonsi. He suggested that they take him to the Jersey shore, drown him and make it look like an accident. Phillips was not interested in the murder plot but wanted to get his hands on some of Petrillo’s counterfeits. So he suggested that Petrillo give them some money to buy a car. They could use the car to run him over and leave his body in the road. Petrillo liked the idea, but suggested they steal a car, rather than buy one. There it remained for three weeks. Then the men met again at a diner on Thayer Street. Petrillo still did not want to give the men money to buy a car but offered to sell them some bogus currency.

Petrillo pulled out a counterfeit five. Phillips was impressed with the engraving and agreed to buy \$200 worth of the bogus bills. Petrillo said he needed two weeks to deliver.

Phillips was pleased and so was his boss, Landvoight. After years of undercover work, they were now close to busting Petrillo. But when two weeks went by with no further communication, Phillips began to worry that Petrillo might have flown the coop. He asked Meyer to try and find out what was going on. Petrillo had vanished.

Meyer decided to first check on Ferdinando Alfonsi, the man Petrillo wanted dead. He drove to the man’s home. A middle-aged woman opened the door and informed him that her husband was very

ill and could not get out of bed. As quickly and politely as he could, Meyer took off.

Agent Phillips felt ill when Meyer explained the situation. They had failed to protect the prospective victim. Phillips called together several other agents and a small posse, posing as insurance representatives, went to check on Alfonsi's condition. When they went inside his home, they were shocked. His pupils were bulging and he could neither move nor speak. The agents then contacted the Philadelphia police. Alfonsi was moved to a hospital.

On the same day, Petrillo contacted Meyer and told him he had the counterfeits. A meeting was arranged at a nearby bus stop. Meyer and Phillips met him there. Petrillo gave the man an envelope, which contained 40 counterfeit five-dollar bills.

Philips was happy to finally get the money, but was also voiced interest about Alfonsi. "You still want that guy killed?" Phillips asked. Petrillo laughed.

"Don't worry about it," He said. "He's in the hospital and he ain't coming out."

In the hospital, Philadelphia investigators ordered a urine specimen from Alfonsi's doctors, which later revealed large quantities of arsenic. So now the case bounced back to Vincent McDevitt, the district attorney. McDevitt had the cops arrest Petrillo on charges of attempted murder. But when Alfonsi died a few weeks later, the prosecution hit the jackpot. The charge was upgraded to homicide.

Needless to say, the arrest of Petrillo was all over the front pages of the Philly papers. Among those who saw Little Herman's picture in the papers was the Prudential insurance doctor who, after having examined Little Herman as Lorenzo the roofer, had thought the fellow looked somehow familiar when he later turned up as Petrino the janitor.

So the wise doctor also went to McDevitt. The A.D.A. found some detectives he could trust and put the wives of the roofer and the janitor on the griddle. Thus they found out about Paul Petrillo, the wolf, who figured large in the whole operation in more ways than one.

When Vincent McDevitt questioned Herman Petrillo, he was skeptical that he would walk away with anything he could use. After all, this was the same man that the Secret Service had worked for so many years to arrest. But a surprising thing happened. Petrillo sang like a canary, almost proud of his life's work. He provided the D.A.'s office with a mind-boggling list of victims and conspirators, ratting out his cousin, Paul Petrillo, along with Morris Bolber, as the masterminds behind the entire operation. Petrillo said that all but three of the victims had been killed with arsenic. He also recounted

how the arsenic was often passed off to a victim as a “love potion,” complete with *fattura* or “hexing” qualities drawn from Italian folklore.

But McDevitt’s office now had the problem of proving Petrillo’s allegations. The only way they could get solid proof would be to exhume every victim. McDevitt already had Ferdinando Alfonsi’s medical records and decided to proceed with that case. He knew that he could always file other charges later.

The Petrillo cousins, knowing the law finally had them, began to sing in unison. Stories about Doctor Bolber, the faith healer, and the Witch emerged from the vocalizing. The Witch was arrested at her home before she could grab her broomstick and beat it. She began to talk, too. But when the cops went around to the brick house on the corner of Moyamensing Avenue and Ninth Street. Doctor Bolber had vanished. It was months before the law caught up with the doctor in Brooklyn, New York running a delicatessen.

**MAY 12, 1939**

## 13 Arraigned In Extensive Poison Case

**‘Hexing’ Tales Heard  
As Police Prepare  
For Early Mass Trials**

**SEVEN ARE WIDOWS  
OF MEN WHO DIED**

**One Woman Claims  
She Gave Husband  
Only ‘Love Potion’**



**Mrs. Millie Giacobbe**



**Carina Favato**

Then Bolber, too, decided to sing. Everybody was singing his own

tune, to save the flesh around his vocal chords. A whole raft of faithless wives were caught in a dragnet as a result of the confessions of the master plotter and his associates.

Herman Petrillo's trial began on March 13, 1939 in Philadelphia's City Hall. The presiding judge, Harry McDevitt, no relation to the D.A. Vincent McDevitt, was a defense attorney's worst nightmare. The judge was known in legal circles as "Hanging Harry." Petrillo's lawyer, Milton Leidner, was a close friend of the judge, but the defense attorney did not expect any leniency.

During the trial, Herman Petrillo didn't offer much of a defense, other than to claim that Bolber, the faith healer, had mesmerized him with "the evil eye" and forced him to do all that bad stuff. The jury wasn't buying it and neither was Hanging Harry.

On March 21, 1939, the jury foreman, 42-year-old Margaret Skeen, read the verdict to the court. Guilty, with a recommendation for death, she announced.

"You lousy bitch," Petrillo snarled as he lunged toward the jury foreman. However, guards quickly restrained him and the judge banged his gavel in an attempt to bring order back to the courtroom. When the courtroom settled down, Judge McDevitt congratulated the jurors.

"You can see how mean and vicious this man is," he told the jurors. "You now realize that was the only verdict you could have returned." He then sentenced Herman Petrillo to die in Pennsylvania's electric chair. Following the verdict, defense attorney Leidner stood up and apologized to the court.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I wouldn't have defended this man had I known he was such scum."

Further inquiry would follow. Upon the conclusion of the trial, investigators announced that 70 bodies would be exhumed and examined for signs of arsenic.

But Little Herman wasn't finished. In an effort to escape the electric chair, he agreed to cooperate with the prosecution. By May 21, 1939, 21 more arrests were made in connection with the poison ring. As the investigation continued, detectives discovered that Herman Petrillo and Bolber also had a matrimonial agency, which was apparently created in order to find new husbands for widows of their victims. Upon finding a new mate, the recent widows would marry and then take out life insurance policies on their new spouses. Afterwards, it was up to the members of the ring to do away with the insured and collect the money.

On May 25, 1939, Morris Bolber pled guilty to murder, possibly hoping that his plea would earn him a lesser sentence. His plan worked and he was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment. A few

months later, in September 1939, Paul Petrillo also pled guilty.

Nevertheless, Paul was not quite as nimble as Bolber and was sentenced to die in the electric chair. But the last major player in the poison ring, the Witch, Maria Favato, also drew a life sentence. In the end, 13 men and women besides Bolber and the Petrillos were either convicted of or pled guilty to first-degree murder. All of these convicted killers served long sentences, the shortest being not less than 14 years in prison.

Paul Petrillo died in the electric chair in April 1941.

Seven months later, Herman Petrillo, who was involved in maybe a hundred murders, died like a coward. When his rubbery legs failed him, guards dragged the weeping man to the death chamber, forced him into the chair and forcibly bent his arms in order to strap him in. He made several attempts to stand up and had to be held in place while other guards fastened the straps.

“Gentlemen, you don’t want to see an innocent man die!” he cried. “Give me a chance to prove my innocence. I want to see the governor.”

They didn’t and turned on the juice.

Thirteen years later, on February 15, 1954, Morris Bolber died of natural causes while awaiting his third parole petition. The Witch got off with life in prison, but also died within prison walls. Some of the wives went to prison; others got off for testifying for the state against Bolber, the Petrillo cousins and the Witch. The last of these lovely ladies passed away in the 1960’s, bringing to an end the episode that is still known in South Philadelphia as “Arsenic Incorporated.”

# The Case of the Philandering Family Doctor

*...in which a Romeo loves 'em and leaves 'em... dead.*

Doctor Henry Meyer practiced medicine in a comfortable, middle-class German neighborhood on Chicago's North Side in the dying years of the nineteenth century. A better than average general practitioner, Doctor Meyer might have rounded out his life cycle in a fairly normal manner but for one thing. He was an incurable woman chaser.

The doctor's wife, Lena, like himself a native of Germany, was a docile, self-effacing hausfrau who had been his childhood sweetheart but who had for some years now been a sort of unnecessary appendage to her husband's amatory progress. Mrs. Meyer never complained about even the more brazen infidelities of the doctor, though if she wasn't aware of what was going on, she had one of the worst cases of undiagnosed astigmatism in medical history.

The doctor was about forty. He was a frail-looking undersized man with a wizened face and thinning cinnamon-colored hair. It was his eyes and his clothes that got the women. His eyes were blue, with just a tinge of violet, and when, from behind silver-rimmed glasses, they focused on a current object of the chase, the lady's better instincts, if she had any, usually went out the window.

Women, at a loss to explain the physician's hold over them, used to sigh and say that they guessed Dr. Meyer had hypnotized them. Without knowing it, they had discerned a considerable portion of the truth.

Meyer had, after his graduation from medical college in Leipzig, studied hypnotism in Chicago under Professor Herbert Flint, one of the celebrated hypnotists of the era. So far as is known, he never utilized hypnotism as a therapeutic agent, but reserved it for his personal use. It must have been a potent force in combination with the persistent single-mindedness of a self-centered person in gaining what he wanted, for Dr. Meyer, far from ministering to the ailments of humanity in an unselfish spirit, was a vain and mercenary practitioner. He had one of the most spectacular wardrobes in the Middle West. He owned enough haberdashery to open a shop, and his collection of walking sticks anticipated every, possible whim.

It was the Inverness cape, however, that really set the little man apart. Meyer had a dozen Inverness capes, the only difference in them being the color of the lining. Some were lined in white silk, some in black, some in deep blue and still others in various shades of red. It

would have been possible for an alert observer to have guessed the physician's mood from the color of the lining of a given Inverness as Meyer minced through the streets of the North Side on a winter night, his last patient out of the way and some woman waiting for him.

The doctor engaged in occasional potation in a neighborhood saloon — an establishment owned and operated by a big man named Henry Geldermann. Herr Geldermann's principal claim to renown was that he could slide a foaming stein of beer father along a mahogany bar, without spilling a drop, than any other bartender on the North Side. Geldermann was also a pioneer among users of the whisky glass with the false bottom, and partly as a result of such path finding, he had long enjoyed a cordial relationship with the receiving tellers of a local German-American bank. His fortune, in fact, was known to be in the neighborhood of \$75,000.

Geldermann's wife, Ida, was a middle-aged blonde. In the normal course of events, it is highly improbable that Dr. Meyer would have looked at Ida a second time, for she was not attractive. However, the fact that Meyer was badly pressed for money — a normal state with him, since he bought lavish gifts for his women — coupled with the fact that Mrs. Geldermann would, in the event of her husband's demise, come into a handsome competence, threw a different and highly intriguing light on the woman.

When, in casual conversation with Ida Geldermann in the tables-for-ladies section of her husband's saloon, the physician learned that Mrs. Geldermann was restless because her spouse was more interested in his bank balance than in her, the first faint shadows of coming events began to fall. Dr. Meyer suddenly appeared to be solicitous of Henry Geldermann's health. Geldermann insisted that he felt wonderful. Meyer shook his head doubtfully and said he would not be responsible for the consequences if Geldermann didn't come to his office for a thorough examination. Meyer found so many things wrong with the saloonkeeper, by way of beginning treatment, that Geldermann wondered how he had ever reached the age of forty-five. In two months Henry Geldermann was dead from what his physician described as "complications." Dr. Meyer permitted a respectable length of time to elapse and then declared his love for Geldermann's widow.

"But you are married," said Ida Geldermann.

"I won't be much longer," said the doctor. He explained that his wife's health had for some time been deteriorating, despite his utmost professional efforts, and that the end was not far off. Nor was it. Lena Meyer passed away one night with only her husband at her bedside. After the funeral, her brother, who had always held the doctor in something less than esteem, called at the Meyer home to have a talk

with the physician. The brother wanted to know why, if his sister had been so sick, her relatives had not been advised until after her death. Getting no response to his summons at the front door, the brother forced his way into the house. He discovered Dr. Meyer and a pretty young lady in the very bedroom where Lena Meyer had died seventy-two hours before. Such behavior on the part of the doctor hardly squared with his protestations at the graveside that life without Lena would be hardly worth living. In the meantime, several brothers and sisters of Henry Geldermann were just recovering from the shock of having found themselves specifically excluded from the saloonkeeper's will. Dr. Meyer, it developed, had prevailed upon his patient to have a new deathbed document drawn up. Everything, it now developed, was left to the widow. It was inevitable that the brother of Mrs. Meyer and the kin of Henry Geldermann would get together, compare notes, and become suspicious. When they relayed their suspicions to the Cook County State's Attorney, exhumations were ordered.

Thus it was found that each body contained a suspicious amount of strychnine.

Preparations for the nuptials of Dr. Meyer and the widow Geldermann were rudely interrupted, when both were indicted for murder. Meyer was charged with the death of his wife and of Geldermann. Mrs. Geldermann was charged with aiding Meyer in the fatal poisoning of her husband.

The physician had a visitor an hour after he was clapped in jail — a sharp-eyed, white-haired gentleman with a strong breath and dandruff on the collar of his blue serge suit. The caller was a lawyer who was known far and wide as "Habeas Corpus" O'Brien. He was a clever legal hawk with an unerring eye for a loophole.

O'Brien gravely listened to Dr. Meyer protesting his innocence, and that of his bride-to-be.

"I'll take the case," he said bluntly, "for a down payment of five thousand dollars."

"I don't have that much money," said Dr. Meyer. The barrister glared at Meyer.

"Get it," he advised, "from Mrs. Geldermann."

O'Brien, his retainer pocketed, excavated ancient, obscure and interpreted statutes and fashioned habeas corpus proceedings of them. For weeks, no judge in Chicago could feel safe in banging his gavel for the opening of court without running the risk of having to listen to a motion by Meyer's solicitor.

When the air was finally cleared of oratory, argument and foolscap, the case against Ida Geldermann, not too strong in the first place, had been nol-prossed. Dr. Meyer was released on moderate bail.

Dr. Meyer and Ida Geldermann promptly married. Now O'Brien

obtained delay after delay in Meyer's trial. His game, found sound by many a criminal lawyer, was that the more time that could be put between the commission of a crime and the trial of the person who committed it, the greater the chance of prosecution evidence weakening through fading memories or a switch in public sentiment. Then there was always the chance of that happiest of all events: the death of a prosecution witness.

O'Brien, who possessed the instincts of a public-relations counselor, now decided to make Dr. Meyer a hero instead of a villain. Since all of Chicago was thoroughly convinced that the little medico was dripping with guilt, O'Brien's job was not an easy one.

O'Brien asked Meyer, "Are you any good at treating kids?"

"I've never treated children," said Meyer.

"From now on," said O'Brien, "you are specializing in them, especially crippled kids. Treat them free of charge and see that everybody knows about it."

A curious thing happened. Meyer seemed to have an almost supernatural touch with children. Several boys and girls who had been crippled for years walked again after he manipulated their joints. In a matter of months, his renown spread the length and breadth of the city. Other doctors brought difficult cases to him, often with highly satisfactory results. Superstitious folk in the foreign neighborhoods looked upon the little man who stood accused of murder as a great healer, a sort of miracle man. Some days the halt and the lame were lined up for half a block from his office.

Dr. Meyer arose, phoenix-like, from his own ashes. Fellow physicians interceded for him with the State's Attorney's office, asking that the indictment against him be dismissed. Sentiment on the part of parents whose children Dr. Meyer had treated free of charge was crystallized by O'Brien. Large delegations camped in the corridors of the Cook County Court House and picketed the homes of assistant state's attorneys. They chanted poems and catch phrases, demanding that Dr. Meyer be cleared.

The State's Attorney's office, carefully considering the problem, realized that the chances were slim indeed of drawing a jury that would convict a man of Dr. Meyer's new status. It was considerably more difficult to prove a poison charge then, than it has been in recent years. So, the murder charge against Dr. Meyer was dropped.

Dr. Meyer had gone to considerable trouble to reach a position whereby he was married to a wealthy woman. But while he had been a success publicly, he had been a dismal failure privately. His second wife, it turned out, had decided to hold onto her money. He had tried everything he could think of, including hypnotism, to pry her loose from it. But he met with nothing but rebuffs.

During the period while the indictments had been hanging over him, Meyer had, upon advice of counsel, eschewed all extramarital relationships. Now he began to make up for lost time. Between his amatory pursuits and the time consumed in trying to find a way of doing away with his wife without getting caught, Dr. Meyer had little time for his practice. The result was that it began to fall off. Women still took money. Meyer was not only broke; he was deeply in debt.

Then one day — two years after his marriage to Ida Geldermann — a big plumber named Peter Bretz came into his office. Meyer saw at once that Bretz, none too bright, was an ideal hypnotic subject.

Dr. Meyer took Bretz home to dinner that night. He had given his wife a big build-up to Bretz. The plumber was immediately smitten by the woman. As weeks wore on, Meyer saw to it that Bretz and his wife were almost constantly in each other's company. He got Bretz more and more in his power until the man was a mere puppet. Playing both ends against the middle, the hypnotic plotter began to work on his wife, too. He had been unable to hypnotize her out of her money, but by suggestion he had her believing she was in love with Bretz. This was all like something that you would expect to read in a badly overdrawn piece of horror fiction. Yet it was one day all to be put down in cold black-and-white courtroom testimony, with the victims admitting that that had willingly accepted the hypnotic attempts of the doctor.

When Meyer had his two pawns just where he wanted them, he planted the seed of murder in Bretz's mind. Bretz, with money Meyer had obtained through performing an operation, was to run off to Colorado with Mrs. Meyer. When he got her there, he was to show her the Grand Canyon. Then, when nobody was looking, Bretz was to shove Mrs. Meyer over the canyon edge. The two subjects left for Colorado. Meyer would be safe from all suspicion this time. People would say that his wife had gotten just what she deserved for running off with one of her husband's patients.

Day by day, Dr. Meyer looked in the newspapers for some word of the accident in Colorado. He was still looking, in vain, when two men from the State's Attorney's Office dropped in on him. Peter Bretz, it developed, had come out of the hypnotic spell when he was on the edge of the Grand Canyon, all set to push Mrs. Meyer to her death. He had returned to Chicago with the woman and they had gone to the authorities and told the incredible story.

Although Dr. Meyer was quickly indicted for attempted murder, the lawyer O'Brien got him released long enough to perform a series of operations, and thus to realize enough cash to finance his legal battle.

O'Brien knew how to handle certain cases, and he liked this one.

Bretz's story, although quite true, had a basically improbable ring to it since the public knew virtually nothing about hypnotism around the century's turn. Yet the State's Attorney had no choice but to put Bretz on the witness stand; that was the only way he could establish the case against the little cinnamon-haired fiend.

Putting Bretz on the stand was like putting the fat in the fire. By the time O'Brien was through cross-examining Bretz, the jury somehow had the feeling that Bretz had hypnotized Dr. Meyer instead of the other way about. So the physician, throwing an Inverness over his trim little frame, walked into a Chicago winter twilight a free man.

Ida Geldermann-Meyer had by this time concluded that her marriage to the doctor was unlikely to turn out successfully. So she divorced him. Despite his second acquittal, the little plotter was in ill repute throughout Chicago.

One bright spot in the otherwise dark picture was a ravishing young red-haired admirer named Mary Dressen. She had attended the physician's latest trial, become enamored of him and written him mash letters.

Mary Dressen was the first woman Meyer had ever met who made him lose his desire for other women. Even Meyer himself could hardly believe that his sex life was at last stabilized. Mary, a thin little thing — but not too thin — was a demanding creature. Meyer didn't want to take any chances on losing her. So he married her. He forged the name of another doctor to a check and went to the Grand Canyon, of all places, on his honeymoon with Mary. When he returned, the police were waiting for him. He had been indicted for forgery.

O'Brien wore a reluctant air as he listened to Meyer's plea that he take the case. Just as O'Brien had suspected, Meyer not only had no cash, but had no prospects of getting any. The solicitor shook his head gravely from side to side. Forgery, he said, was a most serious offense, and he feared there was nothing for Dr. Meyer to do but go to jail. So he went.

In jail, where he was to do a year, Meyer met two men who fitted into his future plans. Both were serving terms for drunkenness. One was a tall, lanky man of thirty-five, named Carl Mueller, who was called the Professor because he was a beer-hall pianist and had long hair. The second was a sawed-off brewery-wagon driver of indeterminate age named Gustav Baum. Meyer's plans for the future were simple. They were based on his need for a large amount of cash with which to take a world tour with his third wife, who visited him regularly in jail. The idea was an insurance fraud.

Professor Mueller, Gustav Baum and Meyer and his wife were to go to New York and establish fictitious backgrounds for themselves. Mrs. Meyer was to resume her maiden name and go through a

marriage ceremony with Baum, a marriage that was never to be actually consummated. Baum, posing as a rich real-estate operator, was to take out \$100,000 worth of insurance in various companies, naming his wife as beneficiary. Professor Mueller, set up in a fancy-looking music studio, was to pose as a long-standing friend of the insured man. So was Dr. Meyer, who was going to resume practice in Manhattan, where nobody knew anything about him. Meyer and Mueller would satisfy the insurance companies of the validity of Baum's claim that he was a big-timer to whom \$100,000 in insurance would be a natural thing. After a respectable amount of time had elapsed, Dr. Meyer, as Baum's physician, was to notify the insurance companies that his friend and patient had died of complications. Meyer, through his professional connections, was to get a cadaver and palm it off on the insurance company's adjusters as Baum. Then, when the \$100,000 was paid to the beneficiary, everybody would split and leave town. It was an ingenious plot, and all of the actors in it liked their parts. Baum, Mueller and Meyer were all released about the same time. Meyer passed some more bad checks to finance the trip to New York. Then everybody left town.

Baum and his wife-in-name-only were rented a beautifully furnished apartment on East 13th Street, near Fifth Avenue, for the benefit of insurance salesmen and examining doctors. It was during this very first phase of the goings-on that the plot got out of hand. Baum, an uncouth man, tried to consummate the marriage. Mary rebuffed him, then reported him to Meyer. The doctor, outrageously jealous, made a mental note of Baum's reprehensible behavior.

Almost a year later, Meyer told Professor Mueller that the plot was reaching its climax. He said, he had, notified the insurance companies that Baum was dead. He requested that the Professor come to the flat on 13th Street and identify a cadaver from a medical college as that of Baum.

Mueller looked at the body.

"That ain't a body from a medical college," he said, startled. "It's Baum hisself."

There was nothing, Meyer pointed out, that Professor Mueller could do about it. Next, Meyer called in Mary.

"I poisoned him," he told her. "I thought you would be glad because of how he treated you."

A fortune was in the offing. Meyer sent out for a case of champagne. He and Mary and the Professor were a little unsteady on their feet when an adjuster from one of the insurance companies walked in on them. A champagne party, in the opinion of the adjuster, was hardly a way for the widow and two closest friends of the deceased to exhibit their grief.

The adjuster made no attempt to hide his bleak view of the situation. This had a sobering effect on the celebrants. As soon as the adjuster left, they all packed and left.

Meyer hung around 13th Street and watched the house where the body was. It began to draw detectives like a honey pot drawing flies. Meyer saw the body being removed. He knew toxicologists would find it loaded with arsenic. It would now be utterly useless, not to say highly dangerous, for Mary to attempt to collect anything on Baum.

Meyer, Mary and the Professor fled to Toledo. There, Mary, in the delayed realization that she was married to an inhuman little monster, left Meyer.

Meyer read in the papers that he was being hunted for the New York insurance murder. He dyed his hair black, substituted rimless eyeglasses for his silver-rimmed ones, and had lifts put in his shoes to increase his height. He topped off his disguise by assuming a new name — Dr. Hugo Weiler. He began to practice in Toledo, Ohio, without a license, just enough to make a living. He held onto Professor Mueller and got him a job playing the piano in a beer hall.

Meyer needed the Professor; he was cooking up still another insurance plot. An outrageously egotistical little man, he wouldn't admit defeat. He would perpetrate a successful insurance plot if it were his last act on earth. He had come to have nothing but contempt for the law-enforcement authorities, and who could blame him? He had gotten away with murder — the murders of Henry Geldermann and his first wife — and with an attempted murder. It had been only through injudicious case of champagne and deplorable timing that the insurance companies had become aware of the fact that all was not regular with the demise of Gustav Baum. The Professor was growing increasingly confused mentally because of the fear that the law would catch up with him and send him to the electric chair in Sing Sing. After all, he had been implicated, however innocently, in a murder.

The professor's plight was all grist for Meyer's mill. He played on the man's fear and brought his hypnotic powers into play on him. Soon the Professor was as much of a pawn as Peter Bretz, the Grand Canyon traveler, had been. With the Professor in his power, Meyer scoured the city for a lonely, plain girl who would fit into the plot he was brewing. He found one: Mary Neiss, a demure young lady of twenty who sold neckties in a Toledo department store. He contrived that the Professor would meet Mary Neiss.

Getting the girl under a spell, Meyer now had little trouble maneuvering the Professor and Mary into marriage. The Professor and his wife went to live in a little cottage on the outskirts of the city. Meyer instructed the groom to take out \$25,000 worth of insurance on the bride. Meyer's influence over Mueller, who knew so much about

him, must have been tremendous for Mueller not to have suspected what was in the wind. But Mueller took out the insurance and Meyer paid for it. Doctor Meyer became a regular visitor at the cottage of the newlyweds. He cooked meals for his host and hostess, preparing what he described as especially nourishing dishes for the Professor's wife. The victim took to her bed. Meyer arrived one day but found the door of the cottage locked. The Professor called on him at his office that evening.

"You can't give Mary any more of that stuff!" he said to Meyer.

"And why not?" demanded Meyer.

"Because I've fallen in love with her," Meyer began to giggle. Then he became hysterical at the irony of it all.

The Professor took Mary to Chicago with him. He had relatives there. He told them everything. Once more the State's Attorney in Cook County listened to an incredible tale involving an incredible criminal.

The hunt for Meyer became nationwide. The doctor fled to Detroit. There he met a woman: the first woman who could make him forget the former Mary Dressen.

Like his third wife, this woman was demanding and expensive. Motivated even now by a woman, rather than caution in the face of great danger, Meyer did the one thing he was capable of doing to make a lot of money in a hurry. He began to practice as a crippled children's specialist.

The hands of one of the most heartless killers of modern times were, miraculously enough, still great healing agents. As in Chicago, he attracted attention in Detroit almost overnight as a miracle man with children. He became lost in his work, not because he cared the least bit about the children he treated, but because of the large sums of money he was making. And at night, when the last cripple had been treated, there was always his latest woman.

But inevitably Meyer's work with children in Detroit reached the wide-open ears of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and one day the Pinks and the Detroit police took him without a struggle.

The Professor went free by testifying against Meyer at Doc's trial for killing Baum. Lucky, Meyer got life instead of death.

The little man must have had visitors in his cell in Sing Sing — Henry Geldermann, his first wife, Ida Geldermann and Gustav Baum, even if no one else could see them. He mentioned their names constantly. Then one day he died: stark, raving mad, presumably after thinking too much about all that he had done.

# The Case of The Traveling Doctor and the Farmer's Wife

*...in which a man has four stepsons, then three, then two...*

The whole shameful business started off innocently enough. On a bitterly cold day in January, in the year of 1909, a petite, nicely-distributed brunette, who was forty-five years old but who, despite the fact that she had four grown sons, looked to be about twenty-eight, went into a doctor's office in the village of Ubly, in Huron County, Michigan, to get something taken out of her eye. The physician, Doctor Robert MacGregor, should have simply looked into the lady's eye, taken out whatever was in there, charged his fee, and seen the last of her.

What did happen, though, was something else again; the doctor saw considerably more of the lady than he should have seen. That set off a chain reaction that was to practically populate a local cemetery with murder victims.

The lady was Carrie Sparling, the wife of John Wesley Sparling, a prosperous milk farmer of neighboring Sanilac County, an hour's buggy drive from the village of Ubly. She appeared in Doctor MacGregor's waiting room about noon that day, after having driven in from the farm herself. When the door of the physician's consulting room opened there stood the good doctor, a tall handsome athletic buck of a man.

MacGregor, who had come to practice in the village five years before, was a native of London, Ontario, and, at the age of thirty, had an oily bedside manner. He was a dandy in dress and sported black sideburns and a handlebar moustache, and had an eye for the ladies despite the fact that he had a wife. Not that the good doctor was to be blamed, for his wife was a bleak little woman, ten years his senior, who would have won any contest as the woman a man would be least likely to choose as a mate on a desert island.

"Well... come on in," said the doctor to Mrs. Sparling. "Come right in!" His voice was a rich, barbershop quartet baritone.

Mrs. Sparling told Doctor MacGregor that she had something in her eye. Her eyes were wide, brown and innocent.

"Which eye?" Asked the doctor. Mrs. Sparling pointed to her right eye, which was red and swollen. MacGregor, who was having a rough time financially, questioned the patient at length. Among other things, he learned that her husband was quite well fixed.

"Just step in there," said the doctor, pointing to an adjoining room, "and take off your clothes." Mrs. Sparling went into the other

room and shortly reappeared wearing nothing but a look of embarrassment. The doctor, it was later to develop, got a thorough look at the patient, finally working his way up to the troublesome eye. Then he took a swab and removed a speck of dust.

"There," he said, "you're all fixed up — for the time being. I'll be wanting to take another look at you," he said. "I'll drive out to your place some night next week. How's that?"

Carrie Sparling was a woman who was no longer used to being looked at and didn't mind the renewed attention. Her husband, John Wesley Sparling, always crowded the entire family into a buggy and hauled them off to church on Sundays, whether they wanted to go or not. He was fifty years old. Like many deeply religious men, he neither smoked nor drank but was a great believer in the propagation of the race. In the past, he had taken a good look, and then some, at his wife on an average of once a year, because he had four sons — Pete, Albert, Scyrel and Ray — whose ages were 24, 23, 21 and 20. (Something had apparently gone wrong during one of those years). Every Sabbath after church, the family, who were terrific eaters, fell on a gargantuan meal. The four Sparling boys were husky fellows with tree-trunk legs, brawny arms and barrel chests, but not too bright in the second story. Farm chores, heavy as they were, weren't enough for the four Sparling boys. Instead of relaxing after the sun went down, they repaired to a sort of gymnasium on the upper floor of the barn and practiced weight lifting, chinned the bar and cavorted on the exercise rings until late at night.

Four days after Mrs. Sparling had dropped into Doctor MacGregor's office, the handsome physician drove onto the Sparling farm. Mrs. Sparling had already told her husband and her sons what a fine man the doctor was, so Righteous-John and the boys gave the doctor a hearty welcome.

Doctor MacGregor, a very conscientious practitioner, didn't seem to be in a hurry, and began looking around for a place in which to examine Mrs. Sparling's eye. He examined first one room, then another, and finally settled on a bedroom on the second floor.

"Just come upstairs with me," he said to Mrs. Sparling, and, while Righteous John and the four boys sat around the parlor, the good doctor and Carrie Sparling went upstairs. The doctor and the patient didn't come downstairs for almost an hour. The doctor looked a little mussed up and Mrs. Sparling appeared to be flushed, one of the boys recalled to a friend later.

"We had quite a time," said the doctor, a truthful man, "but everything seems to be fixed up. For the time being anyway."

During the next several months, Doctor MacGregor managed to be in the neighborhood often. Although Mrs. Sparling's eye trouble

didn't seem to get any worse it didn't seem to clear up completely, either. Sometimes the doctor would stay for supper and take potluck with the family. Occasionally he would remain for the whole evening, leaving an office full of patients sitting around wondering where he was.

Doctor MacGregor observed, during the nightly sporting events in the barn, that the Sparling boys swigged great quantities of drugstore tonic. Most of the stuff contained a stout percentage of alcohol, as well as a small quantity of arsenic, not unusual for the day of unregulated medicines. Thus it was possible for a so-called teetotaler, if he didn't mind the bitter taste, to get half crocked.

MacGregor's closest friend was a young attorney in the town of Bad Axe, a few miles from Ubyly and the seat of Huron County. His name was Xenophon A. Boomhower. MacGregor and Boomhower, with their wives, used to visit each other at night, and, after cards and refreshments, swap shoptalk.

"You know, Xenophon," MacGregor said one night, "I'm worried about Mr. Sparling."

"Righteous John Sparling? Why, he looks like he'll live to a hundred," said Boomhower.

MacGregor shook his head. "That's just it. He's like an apple that's healthy on the outside with a malignant worm inside."

"Meaning what?" asked Boomhower.

"Meaning that John Wesley Sparling," Doctor MacGregor explained, "might be suffering from Bright's disease. That would be my guess.

Bright's disease, as it was known at the time, was a fatal kidney ailment of the day, involving a serious inflammation and malfunction of that organ. In the day, Ty Cobb suffered from it, though he survived it, as did Bram Stoker, author of *Dracula*, who died from it. To be diagnosed with it, was more likely than not, to receive a death sentence. Nonetheless, the good Dr. MacGregor put Sparling Senior on some medications.

But inevitably, one day in June, less than six months after MacGregor had first taken a look at Mrs. Sparling, the righteous farmer with the long black beard did something most unusual. He quit his work in the fields in the middle of the day and took to his bed. Pete, the eldest son, hustled over to Ubyly to summon the doctor.

MacGregor drove down to the Sparling farm every morning and every night after that to minister to the patient, who seemed to have trouble keeping any food in his stomach. While Righteous John was in bed, the Sparling faun received a second visitor, a loud, belligerent little man of seventy, who lived near Ubyly. He too was named John Sparling.

The visitor, however, was known as Old John. He was an uncle of Righteous John, a former State Senator and, in his earlier days, a renowned auctioneer. He was still a spry little character, and his vocal apparatus was mercilessly unimpaired, so that, when he spoke in his auctioneer's voice, he could be heard practically in the next county.

On this day when he came to visit his nephew, after having heard he was seriously ill, the four boys were out in the fields, so Old John went right up to Righteous John's bedroom. Righteous John was in no shape to receive a visitor, or even talk to one, since he was in a semi-conscious condition and practically on fire with fever.

Old John thereupon began a prowling of the house for Carrie Sparling. When, at last, he had looked everywhere for the lady except in her bedroom, he decided to try there.

Old John was used to barging through houses and opening doors without knocking — a carry-over from his auctioneer days — and so when he approached Mrs. Sparling's bedroom he just turned the knob of the door and kept on going.

But the door was locked and Old John, moving too fast to stop, crashed into the door and shook himself up. When the door opened there stood the doctor and the farmer's wife. Old John measured Mrs. Sparling and the doctor and walked away.

A few days later, Righteous John Sparling died. Old John was at the graveside. When the coffin was being lowered, he exploded.

"There's somethin' danged funny about why my nephew died!" he yelled.

"Danged funny! You all hear?"

Folks were in the habit of ignoring the old windbag, however. And they did again this day as they had in the past.

A few months after the head of the Sparling household had gone to his reward, MacGregor, looking to the future, decided it would be a good idea if the four boys took out some life insurance.

"But we're all as healthy as can be," said Pete, now the nominal head of the house.

"You never can tell by appearances," said MacGregor. "Take your father. Look what happened to him."

"You'll do as the good doctor says," said Mrs. Sparling. "He's going to examine all of you for insurance policies and then we're going to buy insurance."

Conveniently, the doctor's father, Alexander MacGregor, was an insurance agent in London, Ontario. The Doctor examined applicants for policies in his father's company. A few weeks later, policies of \$1,000 on each of the four boys with the Sun Life Association of Canada came across Lake Huron from the offices of Doctor MacGregor's father.

It was a lovely night in the spring of the following year. The good doctor and his wife were spending an evening with their friends the Xenophon Boomhowers. Everybody was in good spirits except the doctor. He was depressed.

“What’s wrong, Doc?” asked Boomhower.

“It’s Pete Sparling.”

“Pete?” asked Boomhower, who knew the lad. “Why, he looks the picture of health. What’s the matter with him?”

“Acute pancreatitis.”

“Sounds serious. Exactly what is it?” The doctor reduced the ailment to layman’s language and indeed it was serious. At age twenty-five and at six feet two-hundred pounds, Peter should have been the very picture of Dairy State health. Instead, these days he was walking around the farm clutching his stomach. And, sure enough, Pete died shortly afterward, little more than a year after his father had died.

It wasn’t long after Pete’s death that Doctor MacGregor suggested to Mrs. Sparling that she and the boys leave the farm and move someplace else to get away from their sorrow. Everybody, especially Mrs. Sparling, was all for it. So Mrs. Sparling sold the farm and bought a smaller farm out of Sanilac County and up in Huron County, just outside of Ubyly, where Doc MacGregor’s office was located. By this time, MacGregor was also acting as the merry widow’s financial advisor, so the move was quickly a done deal. The only dissenting voice was Old John Sparling who was now in the habit of popping off to anyone who would listen about the relationship between the esteemed country doctor and his late son’s wife. Gossip did begin to spread, but it didn’t have much traction.

A few months after the Sparlings moved into Huron County, fate intervened again. Who should become Prosecutor of the Huron County but Xenophon Boomhower? The Sparlings had just gotten themselves settled on their new farm and Xenophon had just gotten his seat warm as Prosecutor when Doctor MacGregor walked into his office one day with a worried look.

“What’s wrong, Doc?” asked the Prosecutor. Dr. MacGregor ran a nervous hand over his forehead.

“I’m worried, Xenophon,” he said. “Worried about Albert Spalding.”

“Good God, Doc!” said Boomhower. “Don’t tell me there’s something wrong with somebody else in that family!”

Well, sadly, yes. There was. Albert, Doc explained to the Prosecutor, had lifted a piece of farm machinery that had been too heavy for him and seriously injured himself internally. MacGregor paced up and down the Prosecutor’s office.

"I'm just scared," he said. "Scared that we're going to lose another Sparling. And I'd hate for any suspicion of foul play to fall on Carrie."

"Heaven forbid, Doc!"

There was, MacGregor pointed out, a bright spot on the horizon. Thanks to his friendship and foresight, Mrs. Sparling was being well taken care of by insurance. The lady had, at his suggestion, taken out a couple of additional policies — one on Albert, the boy who had injured himself, and one on Scyrel, with a company called The Gleaners, which was also represented by the doctor's father.

Boomhower got out a pencil and paper and began to do some figuring. Mrs. Sparling was now carrying in excess of \$5,000 insurance, a lot of money then. When he was through, he looked up at MacGregor and said,

"Doc, it sure is a good thing that family met you. Why, with Old John and Pete dying and with Albert in danger, poor Mrs. Sparling would be in an awful fix if it weren't for that insurance. You've been one real friend to that family, Doc, I must say."

A week or so after his visit to Boomhower's office, Doctor MacGregor stopped by the only automobile dealer in Bad Axe and said he wanted to buy an automobile. Doc selected his automobile and said he would want delivery in about a month.

"How do you want to pay for it?" asked the dealer.

"In cash," said MacGregor. "I'll have the money in about a month."

A couple of Sundays later, Albert Sparling complained of increased pains in his stomach. At dinner, Albert had no enthusiasm for eating. Doctor MacGregor took him into his office, which was in the front of the house, and gave him some medicine.

"There's nothing to worry about," MacGregor told Albert. "You'll be behind the plow in a few days."

However, sadly enough, Albert wasn't behind a plow at all in a few days. He was six feet under in the family plot, not far from his father and older brother. Doctor MacGregor ascribed the death to the stomach injury that he had mentioned to Prosecutor Boomhower.

Then, less than a fortnight after the burial of the third Sparling, Doctor MacGregor took possession of his horseless carriage, paying cash for it. It was now April, 1911. Uncle John went wild with his accusations. How, he wanted to know, could MacGregor have afforded a new motorcar? The doctor often received a bartered payment for a house call — chickens, eggs or butter — and when he did receive cash the payment was two dollars. Nor had he been a wealthy man, it was recalled, when he had first examined, so to speak, Carrie Sparling.

Nonetheless, after Peter's unfortunate passing, the doctor and his wife — remember his wife? — set out on a drive to his native Ontario.

While the MacGregors were away on the trip, Mrs. Sparling bought a fine white house, for investment purposes, right in the village of Ubly, not, in fact, more than a hoot and a holler from the Doctor's residence. When the MacGregors returned from their trip, there was some interesting action in Ubly. The house that Mrs. Sparling purchased was a big rambling affair. Since MacGregor was only renting the house where he lived and had his office, Mrs. Sparling, the widow, suggested that Dr. and Mrs. MacGregor rent the house she had bought.

And so they did. It wasn't long after the Doctor and his wife had taken up residence in the Widow Sparling's property that Mrs. MacGregor didn't feel well. The Doctor made a hasty diagnosis of the trouble.

"Dear," he said, "I'm afraid this climate is bad for your health. I suggest that you take a trip to Ontario and visit your relatives. That ought to clear things up." As soon as Mrs. MacGregor left town, there was plenty of action in the house MacGregor was renting from the Widow Sparling. The widow frequently drove into Ubly from her farm, early in the morning, to spend the whole day in the house. One night, when the MacGregors were visiting the Boomhowers, the doctor seemed to be depressed again.

"What's the matter, Doc?" asked Boomhower.

Plenty was the matter. Scyrel, the youngest of the Sparlings, had taken to his bed.

"Good God!" said Boomhower. "Don't tell me somebody else in that Sparling family is going to die!"

MacGregor said he feared the youngest of the Sparlings had cancer. He had decided to call in other physicians for a consultation. MacGregor called in not one, but three doctors to look at Scyrel.

One was a local physician named Dr. Daniel Conboy. Dr. Conboy had extensive training in toxicology. While he had been consulted in Albert's death and had previously agreed to the diagnosis of acute pancreatitis for Albert, something hadn't smelled quite right to him about Albert's passing. So he came into the Scyrel situation with some lurking suspicions. And since the passing of Albert, Dr. Conboy had consulted his trusty Encyclopedia of Medicine and found Scyrel's symptoms indicated something else entirely: arsenical poisoning.

As Scyrel's situation deteriorated, Dr. MacGregor, perhaps anticipating the thoughts of Dr. Conboy, out of the blue asked Dr. Conboy if he suspected arsenic as the cause for the patient's itchy extremities and the irritation in his nose, mouth and throat. Conboy, surprised, allowed that this very well might be the case.

Boomhower specifically told Dr. MacGregor to notify him upon Scyrel's death, for he wanted to order an autopsy. Dr. MacGregor again added that folks shouldn't be surprised if the autopsy did show

signs of arsenic. The Sparling boys were chronic consumers patent tonics, which contained the very same. Manufacturers did not have to adhere to any government regulations, and these “medicines” and “elixirs” promised cures for everything from scarlet fever to gout, and prevention of almost everything else.

Dr. MacGregor also suggested they hire a nurse to keep an eye on Scyrel. Dr. MacGregor thought this was a great idea and wasted no time hiring a Miss Marguerite Gibbs. She was tall and attractive, blonde-haired and blue-eyed. She would be tending to Scyrel on an hourly basis, administering his medicines, monitoring his food and drink. In her spare time, she would also search the Sparling home for poison.

Two days later, the nurse discretely showed Dr. MacGregor a cardboard box she had found in the Sparling kitchen. It was filled with bottles of arsenic. Dr. MacGregor, showing what appeared to be deep shock, dutifully delivered the box of arsenic to the desk of Xenon Boomhower. The implications of Carrie Sparling’s involvement in the deaths of her husband and two sons lay within the flimsy walls of the cardboard box.

After Dr. MacGregor’s departure, Boomhower started to snap out of the trance that seemed to have held him during the past few months. He contacted the local sheriff, Donald McAuley, and requested that McAuley look into additional arsenic sources. Sheriff McAuley, a tall bear of a man in his 40s, began to prowl around the county. He learned a good deal more than what he had expected, hearing from the Sparling neighbors about an alleged affair between Dr. MacGregor and Mrs. Carrie Sparling, quite a scandal in these Edwardian times. Nor could the sheriff ignore the rants of Uncle John.

So Sheriff McAuley started to snoop a little further. Carrie Sparling was on his mind because of that cache of arsenic. But perhaps in addition to Mrs. Sparling, he reasoned, a closer look at Dr. MacGregor might be a beneficial idea.

Upon further investigation at the local bank, the sheriff learned each time Mrs. Sparling cashed an insurance check on the proceeds of her dead sons, Dr. MacGregor’s accounts profited quite nicely. So had Dr. MacGregor purposely thrown suspicion upon Carrie Sparling in attempt to divert the sheriff and the prosecutor?

On August 10, Dr. Conboy made an unannounced visit to the Sparling home. Mrs. MacGregor assisted the nurse in bathing Scyrel, who drifted in and out of consciousness. Dr. MacGregor comforted Carrie. Painfully obvious, Scyrel was about to meet his Maker.

On August 14, Dr. MacGregor called his physician comrades back to Scyrel’s bedside. Drs. Conboy and one Dr. Willett Herrington arrived, as did one Dr. Eugene Holdship, the local medical examiner.

A man Jay S. Corcoran came as well. All present agreed Scyrel Sparling would die before dawn. The doctors departed, save Drs. MacGregor and Holdship. Dr. Conboy reminded Dr. MacGregor to summon him and Dr. Herrington in regards to the autopsy.

A few hours later, Scyrel gasped for the final time.

Always a man of action, Dr. MacGregor made the suggestion to Dr. Holdship they should perform an autopsy immediately. Dr. Holdship was unaware that Prosecutor Xen Boomhower had his own ideas of just who should do the honors.

Outside, Uibly's undertaker, Mr. Hector McKay lounged on the Sparling hammock as he grieved yet another Sparling boy's death. Dr. MacGregor approached Hector, asking him for his knife. Hector obliged. Dr. MacGregor promptly handed the blade to his acquaintance, informing Dr. Holdship he would make the cuts.

In the dark of night, Carrie Sparling held the lantern with as steady a hand as she could manage while Dr. Holdship sliced away, following the direction of Dr. MacGregor. Dr. Holdship removed a few vital organs: the liver, spleen, pancreas and part of the upper intestine, placing them in jars as he removed them from their original owner. The liver appeared swollen and ruptured. Dr. MacGregor diagnosed his death as cancer of the liver, promptly asking Dr. Holdship if the organ appeared diseased to him, also.

Dr. Holdship nodded his agreement. When Dr. Holdship inquired as to whether he should dissect the stomach, Dr. MacGregor indicated Scyrel's stomach looked fine.

"No need to disturb it," MacGregor said. "We have our answers. Let's just stitch him back up."

At the break of dawn, Dr. MacGregor hopped in his new auto. He drove to Bad Axe, the jars containing Scyrel's organs clanking together in an eerie tune in the back seat along the way. Boomhower, who had been preparing to leave for the Sparling farm so he could be present during the autopsy, was shocked when Dr. MacGregor drove up to the local courthouse and announced what he was carrying. Dr. MacGregor handed the jars filled to the brim with Scyrel's organs to his friend, who had previously indicated the contents would be shipped to the University of Michigan for analysis.

Dr. Charles B. Morden, the Huron County coroner, along with Sheriff McAuley and Drs. Herrington and Conboy, stood in the street before the courthouse with their mouths open in surprise.

"Why had Dr. MacGregor performed the autopsy," asked Boomhower.

"Didn't want to trouble you," MacGregor said. "I was happy to help."

But before all three doctors could agree on a diagnosis, the youth

qualified for a place in the family burial grounds. It was night when he passed away, not quietly in his sleep but noisily while awake. Doctor MacGregor and the third physician were at the bedside.

And so the fourth Sparling died, the fourth in three years. A speedy funeral followed.

Time passed and the stew began to come to a boil. Mrs. MacGregor's condition didn't seem to respond to treatment and the doctor was always sending her away to Canada. The woman seems to have been considerably less suspicious than some women whose husbands cheat on them but it must be said for Doctor MacGregor that he was, on the surface anyway, the soul of attention to his wife when she was around.

Mrs. Sparling and the doctor made their first mistake when one night Mrs. MacGregor was out of town, Mrs. Sparling decided to remain all night in the house she rented to the doctor. One of the village gossips, a spinster lady naturally, saw Mrs. MacGregor sneaking out of the house in the early hours of the morning to drive back to the farm. The gossip ran straight to Old John and told him what was going on. So Old John rented a room in the old maid's house, remaining under cover by day, so that he could keep an eye on what went on at Doc's at night.

One night the Widow Sparling checked into the Doc's place in the afternoon and was still there when all the lights went out that night. Old John bided his time until around midnight. Then, carrying a lantern and a ladder, he sneaked up to Doc's house, climbed up the ladder, peeked in a second-story window and got a pretty good view of what was going on between the good doctor and the bereaved widow.

Similarly, Dr. Daniel Conboy, still bothered by the events at the Sparling ranch, paid a visit to Xen Boomhower in Bad Axe. Dr. Conboy had had time to come to some conclusions. He now alleged Carrie Sparling had poisoned Scyrel, the motive: insurance money.

Old John, having seen plenty, dropped in on Prosecutor Boomhower next day.

"I know people think I'm nuts," said Old John, fixing Boomhower with a belligerent stare, "but you won't think I'm nuts if you dig up them Sparling boys."

Boomhower was opening his mouth to respond when who should come in the door but Dr. Daniel Conboy, still bothered by the events at the Sparling ranch. Dr. Conboy had had time to come to some conclusions. He now alleged Carrie Sparling had poisoned Scyrel, the motive: insurance money.

"See?" said Old John, as soon as Conboy piped down. "Told you so!"

There was something so sincere about the bellicose old auctioneer that Boomhower, who had heard gossip, too, decided he had nothing to lose by digging up at least one body. Secretly, of course. So, Boomhower hired a couple of gravediggers. They dug up Scyrel and took him to the office of a doctor in the next county.

The doctor took out Scyrel's vital organs. What remained of Scyrel was ushered back to his grave. At the laboratory of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, Scyrel's vital organs were found to be shot through with arsenic. Boomhower thought things over carefully when he got the news. Then he did a most unusual thing. He called Doctor MacGregor into his office.

"Doc," he said, "I have something unpleasant to take up with you."

"What?"

"There's been a lot of talk in town about all those deaths in the Spading family. So, just to settle the thing one way or the other, I had Scyrel's body exhumed."

"Is that so?" said MacGregor, calm as could be.

"Yes," Boomhower continued, "I sent the vital organs to the University of Michigan." "And what did they find?"

"Arsenic!"

MacGregor looked out the window and drummed his fingers on a table.

"Do you know," he said at length, "I'm not at all surprised."

"You're not? Why not?" MacGregor looked earnestly at Boomhower.

"Why," he said, "because of all that tonic that those boys swigged. I told you that before! You know that tonic contains arsenic. As a matter of fact, I'll bet everybody in that family's filled with arsenic."

"There was enough arsenic in Scyrel to kill an elephant!"

"Long term use," said MacGregor. "That's what happens. Genuinely unfortunate."

Boomhower hadn't thought of that. He looked at MacGregor.

"Doc," said Boomhower, rising and placing a hand on MacGregor's shoulder, "I'm glad all this has come up. It's settled once and for all. I'm convinced you've been a victim of malicious gossip."

Boomhower summoned Old John to his office.

"Mr. Sparling," he said to the old boy, "I don't care what's going on between the doctor and the widow. And I'm convinced Doctor MacGregor had nothing to do with those deaths."

"You are, eh?" said Old John.

"Yes. And that's all that matters."

"Well, I've been doin' a little snoopin' myself. Why don't you go have a talk with the president of the bank here in town?"

“What do you mean?”

“You just do as I say. Then maybe your eyes’ll be opened.”

Boomhower had a talk with the president of the Bad Axe bank. MacGregor, whose practice had never been profitable, had never had any significant money until he bought the automobile. Then he had deposited a check for \$1,000 made out by the Sun Life Association of Canada to Mrs. Spading for Albert’s death, and endorsed over to the doctor by the woman.

The bank records disclosed a second \$1,000 payment by Mrs. Sparling to MacGregor, immediately after the death of Scyrel. Boomhower also learned that MacGregor had been living in Mrs. Sparling’s Ubyly house rent-free. And then there was the undeniable interplay between all of the insurance money dancing from Carrie Sparling’s account into the doctor’s every time a Sparling son bit the dust.

So Boomhower now decided that it wouldn’t be a bad idea to dig up Albert. More arsenic. Had MacGregor, with the aid of Mrs. Sparling, done in all four of the Sparlings, starting with the old man? If so, the doctor had done a very clever thing in moving the Sparlings out of Sanilac County up to Huron County after the second death.

The prosecutor of Sanilac County wasn’t a close friend of the doctor’s, but Boomhower had been. If MacGregor was a murderer, a murderer for profit, he had at least created a most favorable climate for his operations, getting chummy with the prosecutor and conditioning him in advance of the murders to the deaths of the victims.

Boomhower was still wondering what to do as August 1911 turned into September. Then he ran into MacGregor on the street.

“Oh, Xenophon,” said the doctor, “you’re just the man I want to see.”

“Why?” asked Boomhower, smart at last and playing it straight. “What now seems to be the matter, Doc?”

MacGregor ran his hand over his brow.

“It’s about Ray Sparling.”

“Really?” said Boomhower, concealing his alarm and skepticism. “What about Ray?”

“I’m afraid,” said MacGregor, looking off into space, “that Ray is not long for this world. He just seems to not be himself.

True enough. Ray had kept a pretty low profile during all the tragic proceedings. And now Ray was left alone to work the farm. Without his brothers, though, his heart no longer yearned to spend time in the barn or in the fields. Mrs. Sparling decided to leave this farm, too. Too many memories. So Carrie and Ray decided to pull up stakes.

A local auctioneer handled the sale held at 12 noon on Friday, November 10, 1911. Livestock included one brood mare and colt; three horses; one yearling colt; six cows; two yearlings; four calves; one boar; and 20 sheep. Farm equipment consisted of one Sterling hay loader; one Kemp manure spreader; one Champion disc seed drill; one McCormick binder; one McCormick mover; one Champion hay rake; three harrows; two John Deering plows; one Kraus riding cultivator; and two hand cultivators.

Neighbors flocked to the Sparling farm, for the Sparling boys had had a stellar reputation for keeping their equipment in top-notch shape. Before the day was out new owners would walk away with two of the Sparling's heavy sleighs. Also on the auction block were two sets of light sleighs; two lumber wagons; three buggies, one of which was advertised as nearly new; two cutters; and a spring cutter. Ray gathered the gardening tools, hayforks, multiple sets of harnesses, two incubators — one with a 100-egg capacity and the other 200 — and even the Empire cream separator from the barn.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Sparling worked inside gathering the household goods. Three heating stoves and four bedsteads made the sale bill as did three kitchen tables, six dining room chairs, one rocking chair, one dish cupboard and even the organ. Mrs. Sparling had had enough — it was time to move on.

Carrie and Ray took the cash, banked it, and moved into an easier smaller place nearby.

Boomhower meanwhile had a genuine problem. He needed time to go to the grand jury and tell them what he suspected. Meantime, though, he wanted to tip off Ray, the last of the four Sparling boys, not to take any medicine the doctor might be giving him. Moreover, he had to tell Ray not to tell his mother that the doctor was being suspected of mass murder.

Boomhower went out to the new Sparling residence one night. When he figured that Mrs. Sparling and Ray would be asleep, he sneaked into the house, found Ray's room, clapped a hand over his mouth and woke the fellow up. After briefing Ray on what was in the wind, and getting Ray's cooperation to keep mum about everything, he asked,

"Where's the medicine MacGregor is giving you?" Ray gave Boomhower a bottle of the stuff. "When he brings more," said Boomhower, "pretend to take it...but pour it out, spoonful by spoonful. Then turn it over to me."

Ray obliged. The medicine was analyzed and found to contain lethal amounts of arsenic. Finally, Xenon Boomhower had had enough.

Boomhower told a likely story to the grand jury: Doctor

MacGregor and Mrs. Sparling had decided to live in sin. By way of removing obstacles to their amatory progress, MacGregor, with the woman's knowledge, had dispatched the woman's husband. Then, seeing how easy it was to feed arsenic to a victim, he had decided to put murder on a paying basis by getting the boys insured before he did them in. And so the grand jurors handed down an indictment charging Doctor MacGregor with the murder of Scyrel, and Mrs. Spading with being an accomplice. Just Scyrel, mind you, not the others. Why, nobody knew. It was January 12, 1912.

The trial of Doctor MacGregor and Mrs. Sparling was a sensation in Bad Axe. It was held in the local opera house with the judge sitting up on the stage. The only fairly direct evidence against Doctor MacGregor, who was placed on trial first, was medical testimony to the effect that the arsenic found in Scyrel was in such quantity that it couldn't possibly have been self-administered in patent medicine. The rest of the evidence was circumstantial: the two \$1,000 checks that Mrs. Sparling had given to MacGregor and tales of Old John and others that they had seen the doctor and Mrs. Sparling in compromising situations.

MacGregor made a good witness in his own behalf. The money that Mrs. Sparling had paid him had been for medical services. As to the arsenic, he insisted, it could so have been administered via the patent-medicine route.

But Boomhower pulled out all the stops in his address to the jury. He dwelled at length on the fact that Albert, as well as Scyrel, had been found loaded with arsenic. The most damning evidence against Dr. MacGregor and Mrs. Sparling, however, came from Assistant Professor of Hygiene, Richard Pryor, and Professor of Pathology, Alfred Scott Warthin, the University of Michigan pathologists who analyzed Scyrel's organs. The level of arsenic found could not be explained away by the consumption of patent tonics, they said. In their combined expert opinion, Scyrel Sparling had been poisoned.

Dr. MacGregor had his supporters, too. His father attended court each day. Carrie Sparling, who had also been charged in the conspiracy, said she still believed in the goodness of her family doctor. Carrie Sparling maintained that she sprayed plants with arsenic, explaining the box of poison found in her house. The doctor was not responsible for her loved one's deaths.

Ray Sparling, Carrie's last surviving son, defended the good doctor, testifying that the brothers changed the beneficiary to Carrie Sparling on each of their life insurance policies of their own volition. They had wanted to ensure their mother would be properly cared for in the event that they passed away before she did. When Prosecutor Boomhower asked the surly young man how many times Dr.

MacGregor frequented the Sparling farm, Ray smartly stated, "More than a half-dozen and less than three thousand.

The doctor's wife, Ida MacGregor, took the stand on behalf of the defense. She proved to be a valuable witness, testifying with righteous honesty. Though she couldn't change the facts, Ida MacGregor did testify to the relationship in question between the Sparling family and the MacGregors. The families exchanged Christmas gifts and took turns entertaining in each other's homes. The Sparling boys made themselves at home when visiting the MacGregor's, and Ida helped Carrie in any way she could during the Sparling's harvest season. If anything improper had been going on between Dr. MacGregor and Mrs. Sparling, it became evident to the jury that Ida MacGregor had been clueless, or didn't care.

When Dr. MacGregor took the stand, he faced a grueling five days of questioning with an answer for everything, though his statements contradicted the testimony of Drs. Conboy, Herrington and Holdship as well as the county coroner and the sheriff.

Dr. MacGregor explained that Mrs. Sparling's eye ailments required multiple visits to the farm. The endorsement by Mrs. Sparling on Albert's insurance proceeds merely paid off the Sparling debt owed to the doctor. All eyes in the court were on his wife, Ida, when the doctor testified nothing improper had been going on between him and Mrs. Sparling. Ida, noticeably relieved, sat a little straighter.

In all, over 100 witnesses on behalf of either side took the stand to tell their story. Jury selection had begun on April 2, with testimony given between May 1 and June 6. At that point, the Sparling murder trial had been the longest criminal case in the state of Michigan.

At 12:15 p.m., June 8, the jury sent word to the judge; they had arrived at a unanimous vote. Robert Bowman, foreman of the jury, rose to give Judge Watson Beach their verdict:

"We find Dr. Robert A. MacGregor guilty as charged of murder in the first degree; of murdering Scyrel Sparling by arsenical poisoning."

While the courtroom erupted, Dr. MacGregor sat expressionless and strangely quiet. Carrie Sparling, however, had received a mistrial. And charges against her were immediately dropped.

Judge Beach sentenced Dr. MacGregor to life imprisonment at Michigan's state prison in Jackson. Nine weeks had passed since the beginning of jury selection. The Sparling murder case was finally over. Maybe.

A mob had all but gathered at the Bad Axe depot expecting to see Dr. MacGregor off to prison. Sheriff McAuley anticipated as much, and made prior plans to transport the prisoner to Elkton, expecting to avoid a riot. To his surprise, word had spread to all corners of Huron County and an even bigger crowd had gathered at the Elkton depot

than the one that patiently waited to catch a glimpse of the no-good doctor at the depot in Bad Axe. Sheriff McAuley, to his credit, safely escorted the prisoner to his new cell in Jackson.

By July, however, word came back to Huron County that Dr. MacGregor had gained employment within the prison confines, serving as an assistant to the prison physician. He continued to profess his innocence and vowed to work toward redeeming his freedom.

In December of 1912, Dr. MacGregor's attorney requested a new trial. New evidence supposedly came to light in the form of a written statement by a Mr. J.W. Douglas of Bingham. In the statement, Douglas alleged Scyrel had consumed dangerous amounts of patent tonics. Douglas saw a bottle fall from Scyrel's coat pocket, the bottle filled with an arsenic concoction.

Carrie Sparling, no doubt still carrying a torch for Doc MacGregor, took her surviving son, Ray, and moved far away. The State Supreme Court turned down MacGregor's appeal on the grounds that there were not, as the physician was claiming, any legal flaws in the evidence presented against him at the trial.

The Doc became a trusty in prison, then, of all things, the prison doctor. He would have a bad time occasionally when, in prescribing something for a sick prisoner, the con would squint at him and ask,

"You sure there ain't any arsenic in this stuff, Doc?" But aside from that, MacGregor seemed to be quite happy with his prison work. And the inmates developed a genuine affection for him.

But yet, the strange case of Dr. MacGregor just wouldn't die.

MacGregor had been in prison almost four years, sending out hundreds of letters protesting his innocence. One day he dropped a long handwritten letter to Governor Woodbridge Ferris.

Ferris had a special interest in medicine and the health of his constituents. During his term of office, a farm colony for epileptics was established in Michigan, as well as the Central Michigan Tuberculosis Sanatorium. He was popular and received the nickname, The Good Gray Governor. Because of MacGregor's fine work as prison doctor, The Good Gray Governor became interested in Dr. MacGregor's case and questioned several of the jurors.

Two jurors informed the Governor that they would never have convicted MacGregor of the murder of Scyrel had not Boomhower indicated to them that MacGregor had poisoned Albert, too, something for which no one had ever been convicted. The Governor wondered how the Supreme Court had approved such a verdict. He decided to review the whole case. When he did, and when his assistants conducted a series of interviews around Uby and Bad Axe, he found himself seeing the case in a new light.

So one day in 1916 Ferris phoned the prison at Jackson and asked

the warden to send Dr. MacGregor to his office. Without an escort. When MacGregor arrived in the state house, he received a full pardon. Governor Ferris would only said publicly that he had, “uncovered new evidence,” exonerating the doctor. But he would never said what it was.

Then came the most curious turn of all.

Released, a free man, MacGregor found he didn't have a single friend in the outside world other than his wife Ida, who was still faithfully waiting for him when he received his pardon.

But he had no patients, and people cast suspicious glances at him on the street. Carrie was long gone. He moved up to his old home region in Ontario but quickly discovered that the tale of adultery and murder that he had starred in down in the U.S. had followed him there.

So what did MacGregor do but move back to Michigan with Ida and ask the Governor to appoint him prison physician. The Governor complied. The inmates loved him and greeted him with cheers and applause when he re-appeared. Yes, he was back in the slammer, but this time he could come and go as he pleased.

But what exactly did happen to the Sparlings and who really was responsible for their deaths? Why did the governor grant a full pardon without offering evidence of his decision to the people?

As the years went by, more than a few people who lived in rural Huron County managed to take a backward glance at the MacGregor murder case. And long after all the principals had gone from this earth, an odd perspective fell into place.

Back in 1912, remember, Prosecutor Boomhower dropped the charges against Carrie Sparling, due to insufficient evidence. Mrs. Sparling and her surviving son, Ray, then moved to Port Huron to escape the relentless speculation of her involvement in the deaths of her husband and three sons. Carrie Sparling lived comfortably for another two decades, then died in 1933.

That left Ray. Resilient, innocent Ray, who was the last son standing when Boomhower took Dr. MacGregor to court and prison. It was funny about Ray...

The first to die had been his father, John Wesley. Peter, the next oldest male then died, followed by Albert who fell in line by age behind Peter. But if the killer had been following a pattern by murdering the oldest male Sparling down to the youngest, to put forth a theory, Ray should have been next. Yet, he wasn't. Scyrel, instead, met his Maker.

Odd.

You see, if Dr. MacGregor was indeed innocent as he always insisted, and his only crime falling in love with Carrie Sparling, who

then, had poisoned the Sparling men? Had the sheriff and the town and the prosecutor been so busy looking at Dr. MacGregor and Mrs. Sparling that they failed to look at someone, anyone, who had something to gain?

What, if anything, could be gained? A farm, perhaps?

Little is mentioned of Ray Sparling in the various contemporary accounts of the case. No allegations have ever been made against Ray, the last surviving male Sparling. And none will be made here.

It is interesting to note, however, a particular document on file at the Huron County courthouse. After Mrs. Carrie Sparling held the auction on November 10, 1911, to sell her house and farm wares, she deeded her Bingham Township property on December 18, 1911, to Ray Sparling.

Following the paper trail, a deed dated March 21, 1917, shows Ray Sparling sold the 40-acre farm to Mr. William Elliot for the hefty sum of \$4000. Not bad pocket change for the times: equivalent to about \$100,000 in 2014 dollars.

Ray, by the way, lived to a ripe old age, passing away in 1971 at the age of 81. He was probably the last person who knew the full account of what transpired at the Sparling farm early in the Twentieth Century. But if he knew, he never told anyone, and the secrets of his mother, Dr. Macgregor and the deaths of his three brothers, passed away with him.

# The Case of The Jekyll-Hyde Sawbones

*...in which a doctor leads two lives, both incredible...*

It would have seemed, back in the year of 1923, that the future was a cloudless one for Doctor Pierre Bougrat. The good doctor was lucratively engaged as a general practitioner in the provincial town of Aix, some 30 kilometers north of Marseilles. A smallish, quick-moving man of 32, with a pale, square face, a brush moustache, and a pompadour, he was married to a bleak-featured aristocratic woman who didn't believe in children or the means to that end.

Still, the doctor felt he was indebted to her. And he was. Madame Bougrat's father, a wealthy industrialist, had bought the Aix practice for Bougrat after the doctor had achieved distinction as a captain in the Medical Corps in the First World War. The doctor had been awarded both the Military Cross and the Legion of Honor during WWI, two of France's highest military honors. Impressive stuff, considering the pounding the French had taken in the Great War.



After the end of the war, Bougrat set up a small practice in Marseille in addition to the practice in Aix. In Marseilles, he showed great empathy for the down and out ex-soldiers, the prostitutes, pimps, drug addicts and drug traffickers; he often provided his services without charge.

Dr. Bougrat had a fine bedside manner, and as he buzzed through the streets of the ancient town of Aix in a little blue roadster, he received grateful nods from the citizenry. Many a despairing patient, entering the doctor's office on the ground-floor front of his home, a crumbling but fashionable two-story stone house on the Rue Lenas, left walking on air after being treated with a few cheering words and a slap on the back.

Perhaps the future was too cloudless... and too dull for the doctor. For it was in the cards that Bougrat, the soul of respectability, was about to carve a niche of his own in the hall of infamy. Motivated by an age-old reason, the doctor apparently was to embrace the notion of murder for profit and to make such a success of the enterprise that for decades afterwards retired veterans of the Marseilles Sûreté muttered in their beards when they so much as thought of Doctor Bougrat.

The whole baleful business had its genesis in the fact that the doctor was married to a woman who was not an enthusiastic performer on the connubial couch. In the beginning this had not caused the physician any particular concern. He was usually so tuckered out after ministering to the lame, the halt and the blind that when night closed in he was ready for a bottle, a bird and an early bed.

Then, one foggy winter night, after a day at his office in the tumultuous port city of Marseilles, the doctor was ready to hit the road for home when the devil whispered in his ear. So instead of driving northward, he headed over to the wicked Marseilles waterfront. He eyed the dives that huddled together in the mists along the dark, mean streets, and presently his gaze fell on a theater that featured a sort of poor man's Folies Bergère.

He bought a ticket.

Hunched down in a front-row seat, hoping nobody would recognize him, Bougrat soon realized he was looking at a show that was a show. The chorines didn't wear so much as G-strings. One of them gave the doctor the old eye, and Bougrat, deciding at long last to live it up, winked back.

After the show, the doctor and the lady got together. As he chugged home that night in the little roadster, Bougrat realized that a whole new world had opened up to him.

During the months following, Doctor Bougrat, giving his wife one excuse after another for his absence from home until the small hours, made a habit of frequenting the dives along the Marseilles waterfront. So far as he could see, Madame Bougrat seemed unaware of anything out of the ordinary. Seemed, that is, until the morning, when he was returning home shortly before dawn, that he found her sitting up for

him with fire in her eyes.

"Well," she demanded, "what's the excuse this time?"

"Oh," said the doctor calmly, "a colleague of mine in Marseilles has a complicated case and he called me in for a consultation."

"In a whore house, Pierre?"

It developed that Madame Bougrat, suspicious at last, had hired a private eye to tail her husband. Spying Doc going into what is known delicately as a *maison des chattes*, the dick had sped back to his client with the dreadful news, reaching Aix a couple of hours ahead of Bougrat.

Luckily for the doctor, his wife was not in a position to do much while her father was alive. The old boy doted on his war-hero son-in-law, and the daughter feared that if she divulged the truth the shock might kill him. Consequently, she agreed that as long as her father was alive they would put on a show of living in connubial bliss. Actually, he could go his way and she would go hers. Thinking it over, Bougrat realized he was lucky in the way his wife took the shock of her discovery. But presently he began to worry about his colleagues. If the news ever got around how he was spending his nights, his professional reputation would be badly disfigured. And increasingly, he was hooked into the nightlife of Marseilles: the women, the gambling and the booze.

Playing around with the problem, Bougrat hit upon a solution. He decided to appear in Marseilles thereafter not in his usual black suit, high stiff collar and bowler, but in disguise. So he went out and bought himself a French hoodlum get-up: the corduroy pants, black turtleneck sweater, and beret of the French Apache. This rig he put in the rumble seat of his little blue car so that, on the way to his nightly revels, he could stop along a lonely stretch of road and change clothes...and identities.

Bougrat was, of course, playing with fire in more ways than one. The Apaches were a loosely grouped association in the French underworld at the time, much like the Black Hand in Italy. They were strongly associated with Paris, but had some powerful gangs in the other French cities, including Marseilles.

During their heyday in the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, the prospect of being mugged by Apache gangsters was a daily preoccupation of proper French society. Some of the gangs developed a unique type of pistol which was named the "Apache revolver": a pin fire cartridge revolver with no barrel, a set of fold-over brass knuckles for a handgrip, and a folding knife mounted right underneath the revolver-drum for use as a stabbing weapon. It was a weapon to be reckoned with, as was anyone who carried one.

The Apaches also developed a distinctive process of mugging

people: The most famous was the so-called *coup du père François*, a tactic by which a victim was stalked by several gang members and eventually garroted from behind; one Apache was assigned the job of searching through the victim's pockets for money, while another served as a lookout.

But Bougrat passed himself off by night as a member of this underworld society. And by day he was a devoted doctor.

For more than a year Bougrat successfully carried on this Jekyll-Hyde existence. No matter how rough the night, he was always on the job next day. Then, with shocking suddenness, his hijinks began to catch up with him. He was frequently late for his office hours, and sometimes, despite a waiting room filled with the ailing, he never showed at all. His better-off patients began to defect to other doctors, and eventually his practice dropped off. Meanwhile, the horse races he bet on and the roulette wheels where he dropped wagers at night were all going in the wrong direction. He was cash strapped... or would have been, without his wife's fortune.

A year or so after Madame Bougrat's gumshoe had caught the doctor playing games, her father died. Since there was no longer any reason for her to keep up appearances, she divorced the doctor and moved to Paris. That left Bougrat alone in the big house in Aix, which, in light of what he soon had in mind, was just as well.

One afternoon the doctor's nurse, an absent-minded old maid, announced a new patient: an elderly widow named Bernays. Madame Bernays tottered in laden with gems and declared she was suffering from arthritis. As she catalogued her symptoms, Bougrat nodded pleasantly and flicked his popping eyes over that showcase of rocks. Suddenly he mapped his fingers, rose, and left the room. In a moment he was back with a small glass of fluid.

"This will help you no end, *madame*," he said, and gave it to the old doll to drink. He could hardly have spoken more truly.

A month passed. Then one afternoon a young nephew of Madame Bernays appeared in Doctor Bougrat's office and inquired about his aunt.

The doctor reached into a card file.

"Ah, yes," he said. "Here is your aunt's record. I sent her to a colleague in Paris." He looked up at the nephew and blinked his eyes earnestly. "At least that's where I told her to go."

A week later the nephew was back. His aunt had never reached Bougrat's colleague, he declared, as Bougrat looked off into space.

"Your aunt was elderly, *monsieur*," the doctor said, "and as I recall, she seemed subject to amnesia. It is entirely possible that she wandered off somewhere and will turn up in good time. One must be patient with the old. They are sometimes soft in the head."

The nephew was patient to the extent of a few weeks, then, when his aunt still hadn't appeared, he went to the local gendarmes, who in turn relayed the information to the Marseilles police. There the report passed along until it went across the desk of Commissioner Pierre Robert of the Sûreté Nationale. Robert, a smallish man with a wrinkled face, knowing blue eyes, and an elephant's memory, had long since come to look upon practically everybody and everything with suspicion. But when he read that a Doctor Bougrat had declared Madame Bernays suffered from amnesia, he dismissed her disappearance as none of his official concern.

He had almost forgotten the case when, later in the year, an officer of a Marseilles bank called to tell him that a wealthy depositor named Petiot had dropped from sight after cleaning out his account. The banker was anxious to get Petiot's signature on some important papers.

"Tell me about the man," said Robert.

"Petiot," said the banker, "had been a somewhat eccentric character, given to lapses of memory. Just before his disappearance he had been consulting a physician in the town of Aix."

"What was the doctor's name?" asked Robert.

"Bougrat. Doctor Pierre Bougrat."

The commissioner lifted an eyebrow and stroked his jaw. He promised he would look into the matter.

Next morning, Robert drove to Aix and popped in on Doctor Bougrat. He said he understood the doctor had treated a patient by the name of Petiot. Bougrat nodded and pointed out that he had several patients named Petiot. Could the commissioner give him any further information? When Robert supplied it, Bougrat smiled sadly.

"Oh, that old man," he said.

He went to his file, pulled out a card on the missing eccentric, and glanced through it.

"I advised him to take a long sea voyage," he told Robert. "Whether he followed my advice or not I have no way of knowing." The doctor tapped his temple with a forefinger. "Petiot is in his dotage, monsieur, and you can never predict the behavior of anyone in that condition."

As the commissioner sat weighing this intelligence he also studied Bougrat, who was wrinkling his brow with obvious concern. In a moment Robert decided it was unlikely so earnest and humble a country medic, much less a war hero, could have anything to do with the disappearances. So he got up to go.

"If you should hear from the old man," he said, "let me know."

During the next two years Doctor Bougrat was a very busy little beaver. Several nights a week he caroused in his Apache outfit in the

dives of Marseilles. Usually he got there just when the fun began, but occasionally he was late, and every time he was late it just happened to be after he'd treated an elderly patient alone.

Somehow, at such times, when he had shut up shop, he also barreled through the dark countryside in that little blue car, headed toward the River Rhone which flowed into the sea. Long restful walks...? Or was he dumping something off?

All this time, Commissioner Robert of the Sûreté was having his official headaches. Every few months there came to his desk a report that some well-heeled resident of the region had dropped through a hole into space. Invariably the missing citizens were elderly and without close kin. Thousands of such persons vanished from view throughout France every year, however, and Robert showed no suspicion that foul play might be afoot.

Still, he was not a man to ignore any possibility. Since two of the missing, Madame Bernays and old man Petiot, had been patients of Doctor Bougrat, the commissioner dropped in on the doctor once in a while when he was in the vicinity of Aix. Oddly enough, he always seemed to be asking the doctor whether he had, by any chance, treated the latest citizen to vanish. And every time, the doctor went to his files and looked through them. Never again, however, could he find that he had had acquaintance, professional or social, with any of the people Robert sought.

Once in a while, with a sad shake of his head, he invited the commissioner into the living quarters of the big stone house and broke open a bottle of Cognac. In time the two men apparently became friends.

Things might have gone on this way indefinitely if, one certain fatal night, the doctor hadn't gone to Marseilles to enjoy a little of his usual entertainment. Decked out in his corduroy pants and turtleneck sweater, he had hardly settled down in the front row of a bare-bottomed show house when his eyes hit a girl who had just joined the chorus line.

He never even saw the others.

Hustling backstage after the show, the doctor snagged her as she was coming out of the dressing room. Her name was Andrea Audibert and she was a real looker. A brunette at least half a head taller than Bougrat, she was sinewy and lithe, and her wide gray eyes looked out over high cheekbones to promise a time that was a time. Bougrat trotted right along with her to her room near the theater.

Practically every night thereafter, Bougrat, who was obviously a man of considerable stamina, drove down to Marseilles and picked up Andrea. One night the doctor had a startling thought.

"Andrea," he said, "I have fallen in love with you." Andrea

thought that statement over carefully. Then she told the doctor that she was in love with him, too.

Bougrat, having wearied of the wear and tear of the nightly round-trip between Aix and Marseilles, suggested to Andrea that she come and live in his big stone house. "You can pretend you are my housekeeper," he said.

Andrea said that the suggestion, attractive as it was, wouldn't be practical. Bougrat wanted to know why. Because, Andrea replied, she was in the employ of a pimp named Marius.

"I'll see Marius," the doctor said, "and have a talk with him."

"I'm afraid it won't do much good," replied Andrea. "He's a bad man."

Marius was a real Apache, with a mean, chalky face leering above his black turtleneck sweater. He had quarters near the theater where Andrea worked. The doctor found him there and got right to the point.

"I want Andrea," the doctor said.

"You already have her."

"But I don't want anybody else to have her."

Marius looked slit-eyed at the doctor and let out a chilling laugh. That apparently ended the negotiations.

There seemed nothing else to do, so Bougrat and Andrea continued their liaison, unmindful of the gathering storm, until a new complication developed. Andrea had become so enamored of the doctor that she no longer put her heart in her work with other clients. The result was that the customers complained to Marius.

Fiery mad, the pimp accosted the doctor one night under a street light. Marius opened the meeting by slowly running his right forefinger across his throat. Then he started to snarl. The doctor, he said, had spoiled a good piece of merchandise, and he demanded reimbursement for the loss.

Bougrat, cheerfully admitting the facts, asked Marius how much he wanted for Andrea. Marius wanted 9,000 francs, equivalent to maybe \$5000 at the time or \$100,000 today. That was a sizeable sum, far more than Bougrat had. He tried to beat down the price. But the pimp stood firm.

"All right," said Bougrat, "I'll raise the money somehow."

In the late afternoon of the next day, a Friday, Doctor Bougrat was sitting in his office wondering how he would meet the Apache's terms, when Luck walked in. It planted itself before his desk in the form of a self-effacing little man with a pinched face, buck teeth and a glazed black suit. His name was Jacques Rumèbe, and he was the paymaster of the St. Henri steel pipe mills in Aix. He was also an old patient of Bougrat. The men had been great friends and companions in

the army.

The relationship between the doctor and the paymaster had begun years before on the battlefields of Bulgaria, when Bougrat, a medical officer, had treated Private Rumèbe for syphilis. The affliction did not heal, and after the war it began to sap Rumèbe's strength. The little paymaster feared that if he revealed the seriousness of his condition to his employers that they might replace him. So Rumèbe followed the habit of sneaking into the doctor's office every Friday afternoon after work to get an injection that would keep him on his feet for another week. Not even Rumèbe's wife knew he was receiving the treatments. And Bougrat had promised never to mention it to anyone.

Bougrat had come to take the visits of the paymaster for granted until this particular Friday, when Rumèbe had suddenly assumed a new importance. After giving the patient his injection, Bougrat invited him to sit down for a chat.

"Your employers must have great trust in you," the doctor said, letting you carry all that money from the bank every Saturday."

"Oh, yes," said Rumèbe, "they have perfect faith in me."

"How much money do you really handle? Is it so great an amount?" Bougrat asked.

"Sometimes more than 100,000 francs."

The doctor gulped.

The following Friday afternoon, when the pipe mills were releasing their workmen for the day, Doctor Bougrat just happened to be passing the main gate in his little blue car. When he saw the paymaster coming out he hailed him.

"I'm glad I ran into you, Rumèbe," said the doctor. "I won't be able to take care of you today. But I can see you tomorrow." Rumèbe, badly in need of the shot, asked eagerly what time. Since the doctor's office was midway between the bank where Rumèbe picked up the payroll and the factory, Bougrat casually suggested that he drop in on his way back from the bank. The little paymaster couldn't have been less suspicious.

That evening, according to testimony that was later heard in court, the doctor sat down and, disguising his handwriting, composed a letter to the St. Henri mills. The letter stated that the company's paymaster was carrying on a secret love affair with a prostitute in Marseilles and should no longer be trusted with money. When the letter was written, the doctor stuck it in his pocket. He was not quite ready to mail it.

A little after 10 the next morning Rumèbe appeared at Bougrat's office. "How are you feeling?" the doctor asked solicitously. "I need the treatment bad," the paymaster said. "I don't know what I'd do if

you didn't give me an injection every week."

Bougrat smiled understandingly and glanced at the satchel the man was carrying. He prepared a hypodermic needle and told Rumèbe to roll up his sleeve.

"This will take care of you," the doctor said gently, and rammed the needle in.

When, by noon, Rumèbe had not turned up at the St. Henri mills, the police were summoned. Within an hour the whole town knew the paymaster had disappeared with the payroll.

Doctor Bougrat did not budge from his house until nearly dusk, when he took the short walk to the post office. He had just reached the outside mail slot when the local gendarme came by on his beat. They exchanged greetings and the doctor asked what was new. The cop was surprised that the doctor hadn't heard, Rumèbe the paymaster had disappeared with more than 100,000 francs of his employer's money.

"Parbleu!" the doctor swore. "What a terrible thing to do."

"Is he a patient of yours, Doctor?"

"No, I don't recall ever having seen the man."

"No matter," the policeman said. "He will not get far. The Sûreté has an alert out, and every train, every bus, even every car around here is being watched." The cop looked thoughtful. "One could almost wish he had a chance: it is a lot of money. Au revoir, monsieur."

The gendarme walked away, and Doctor Bougrat looked after him pensively. He dropped the letter to the mill in the slot and returned home.

A little later Doctor Bougrat got into his car. He had intended to head for the Rhone to dispose of a recent but decidedly embarrassing acquisition. In the light of what the gendarme had said, however, that errand was out of the question for the time being. He would simply have to leave the thing in the closet locked up.

So, instead of the Rhone, Bougrat lit out for Marseilles. He found Marius and said he had come with the money for Andrea. The Apache counted his 9,000 francs, stuck the money in his pocket, and told the doctor where he could find Andrea. As an afterthought he added a suggestion where they could both go.

Bougrat picked up the girl and drove her to Aix to assume the role of housekeeper. Andrea wondered whether the scheme would work. The doctor was sure it would if, instead of being rouged to the ears, she wore no make-up and dressed conservatively.

On Sunday morning Andrea got up ahead of the doctor to make an omelet for breakfast. Looking around for a skillet, she found she couldn't open the door of one of the kitchen closets. Going to the foot of the stairs, she relayed word of her plight to the doctor.

"We don't use that closet anymore," Bougrat called down. "And never mind about the skillet. I'll just take some fruit for breakfast."

All week end the hunt went on through the countryside for the missing paymaster. Official and unofficial opinion had become divided as to whether Rumèbe was an absconder or a murder victim. But on Monday morning when the doctor's anonymous letter arrived at the St. Henri mills, the answer seemed certain. Rumèbe, the timid little man, leading a double life, had obviously taken French leave with the payroll.

While the whole town of Aix was talking about Rumèbe, a couple of paperhangers, hurriedly summoned by the doctor, were busy in the kitchen of the big stone house. When they came to the door that Andrea hadn't been able to open, one of them noticed it had been nailed up. Sticking his head into the adjoining office, he asked Bougrat what he wanted done about it.

"Tear off the outside frame," said the doctor, "and paper over it. There are so many wires and heating pipes inside that it is useless."

Late that afternoon, who should pop up in Aix but Commissioner Robert of the Sûreté? After buzzing around town trying to extract some clue that might lead him to Rumèbe, Robert went up to the door of Doctor Bougrat's house and pulled the bell. Andrea, dressed in a demure black frock, answered. Robert gave the girl a puzzled double-take.

"Haven't I seen you someplace before?" he asked.

"I wouldn't know, monsieur," answered Andrea politely.

Robert cocked his head and eyed her steadily for a moment, as policemen have a habit of doing. She looked slightly uncomfortable, but it was a little late for Andrea to start blushing, so she didn't.

"Is the Doctor in?" the commissioner finally asked.

"Oui, monsieur," said Andrea. "But he is busy just now. Will you wait?"

Robert nodded, his eyes still on her, and she showed him to a seat.

When the doctor had dismissed his patient, he came into the waiting room with his usual sad smile

"I'll bet I know why you're down here, Commissioner," he said. "Isn't it terrible about that paymaster?"

"Did you know him?" asked Robert. "Did you ever have occasion to treat him for anything?"

Bougrat looked off into space. "That's the strange thing," he mused. "This is not a large town, yet I can't recall ever having laid eyes on the man."

"Or hear any stories about him?"

Bougrat shook his head, and Robert got up to go.

"Don't be in a rush, Commissioner," said the doctor. "Stay and have a drink with me."

He led the commissioner to the dining room, next to the kitchen where the paperhangers were at work. Robert, hearing them, peered in curiously. Bougrat explained,

"I'm having the kitchen done over. How do you like the paper?"

"Looks fine," said Robert. He glanced at the old paper still exposed, and noted that it seemed hardly faded at all.

The commissioner left shortly, and as he was returning to Marseilles through the thickening dusk, he couldn't get the girl at the doctor's house out of his mind. He was sure that he had seen her someplace before.

On an impulse he returned to his office. There he began to flip through the picture files of girls who had come under the scrutiny of the police for anything from prostitution to murder. Hours passed. Along toward midnight, when Robert was fortifying himself with glass after glass of black coffee, he came to the picture he was looking for.

Andrea Audibert, it seemed, had been brought to Marseilles from Paris not long before to appear in third-rate music halls and double as a prostitute. And the man who had brought her was Marius.

Now Robert went to another file. Presently he was scanning all the cops knew about the pimp. One opinion stuck out: Marius was perhaps the hardest man in the Marseilles underworld with a franc. Going back to his desk, Commissioner Robert sat sipping hot black coffee, lost in thought. If Andrea had been one of the stable of girls maintained by Marius, how come she had made the jump from Marseilles to the doctor's home? Had she just been up in Aix temporarily when Robert called? He thought not. There had been something about the way she had stood in the doorway that led him to believe she was in permanent residence. Perhaps it was her very lack of make-up, most unusual in a *femme de joie*.

Robert started sniffing around the waterfront dives of Marseilles. Among a host of minor items, he learned that Marius, unlike most Apaches, believed in banks. At the bank where the pimp kept his money, Robert found out that he had made a deposit of 9,000 francs, on the Monday after the paymaster dropped from sight.

The commissioner wondered if there was a connection between the bank deposit and the appearance of the prostitute in the doctor's house. He also wondered if there was a connection with the disappearance of the paymaster. Had that anonymous letter to the mill been a fake, a red herring to throw the police off?

He had to get some answers. Sneaking into Aix at night, Robert watched the stone house where the doctor lived. He could see, moving on the window shades, two shadows, obviously those of Bougrat and

the Audibert doll. When the lights went out, Robert let himself into the garage.

He didn't know exactly what he was looking for, but after a little poking around he lifted up the rumble seat. Thus he came upon that Apache attire of the doctor's. Why, Robert asked himself, would the doctor have been driving around with that rig in the rumble seat? Inevitably it was a disguise. And it must have been used where such clothes were common, in the dives of Marseilles. The commissioner's mind clicked on. There the doctor must have met, and purchased, the girl who was now living in the big stone house.

But the whole story, the whole series of suppositions, pushed credibility past reasonable limits. Robert just couldn't fathom it.

In the days and nights that followed, however, Robert poked into the known past of the doctor. He thus put together the story of the defection of Bougrat's patients. This buttressed the suspicion in Robert's mind that Bougrat had suffered from a shortage of funds with which to finance the revels.

Now, suddenly, Robert began to think about two paperhangers he had seen in Bougrat's kitchen on the Monday following the paymaster's disappearance. Had Bougrat murdered Rumèbe and, not being able to dispose of the body elsewhere before the hue and cry went up, stuffed it in a kitchen closet? Then, to cover things up, had he had the kitchen papered and the closet sealed?

One night, some three weeks after Rumèbe had dropped from sight, Robert, nostrils flaring, hung around Bougrat's house until the lights went out. Then he jimmied his way into the kitchen and played a flashlight on the walls, looking for a sign of unevenness to indicate a closet that had been papered over.

Robert found something even more interesting. In one area of the wall, his flashlight picked out several worms busily engaged in boring their way through the wall. Those worms told the detective that he had come to the end of the trail. Worms, he knew, were attracted to the decomposition of flesh and were able to figure out, even though a layer of wood, what human nostrils couldn't detect.

When Robert tapped the wall and heard a hollow sound, he knew he was rapping on a closet door. Jimmying the door, the Sûreté man found the decomposing body of Jacques Rumèbe.

By then it was dawn and Robert was jolted by a banging on Dr. Bougrat's front door. He concealed himself as he heard Bougrat crash down the steps to open the door. Thereupon several other law enforcement types confronted Bougrat over a series of bad checks that he had passed to cover some of his debts. Robert listened to this commotion for several minutes before stepping out of the kitchen and interrupting the financial haggling. He went then to arrest Doctor

Bougrat for murder.

Bougrat admitted everything but the murder. But the detective had the vital organs of the corpse analyzed and found that death had been caused by an overdose of the drug arsenobenzol. The motive, insisted Robert: murder for profit.

At his trial, Bougrat admitted that he had administered the drug, secretly, so that he could keep Rumèbe on his feet and save the man's job for him. But, since the administration of the drug was an inexact science, he had given the paymaster an overdose by mistake. Feeling the effects of the overdose, Rumèbe, had come staggering back to the doctor's office that Saturday a few hours after having received his treatment from Bougrat. Not only was he sick, but he was in a panic, Bougrat said. He had paid a drunken visit to a brothel claiming and had lost his satchel, which was full of money. Feeling too sick to function on his own, he asked Bougrat to go back to where he had been and try to find the money. Bougrat did as asked but when he returned empty-handed he found his friend dead on the floor. He then panicked, he said, and, his better judgment suspended, he had sealed Rumèbe up in the closet.

And where did the money come from for Bougrat to purchase Andrea from Marius, the cops asked next. That was from all those bounced checks, Bougrat said: he was desperate to get the woman he loved away from the gangster, so he hung bad paper all over the south of France. What about those wealthy old folks who had disappeared, Robert also inquired. An unhappy coincidence, Bougrat said, and only two had been his patients.

On the surface, the doctor's alibi held together. But the police and prosecutors, recalling that body stuffed into a closet, just weren't buying it.

The trial, of course, was a regional sensation and even made international news, with most observers feeling that Bougrat just plain seemed like a guilty man, what with that ex-hooker for a playmate, the Apache clothing, the love of money and nightlife and the dead war buddy with syphilis.



So Bougrat was found guilty of the murder by a vote of six to five under the French jury system of the time. He faced the guillotine, and the majority of the jury, working up a real bourgeois dislike for the man recommended it.

But under French law, no man could be put to death who was in a certain category of war hero. Bougrat — remember those medals? — was so classified. So he was sentenced to twenty-five years on Devil's Island with no possibility for parole. He was sent there immediately by boat, leaving a heartbroken Andrea behind, and still maintaining his innocence.

End of story? Far from it!

Devil's Island is located approximately nine miles off the coast of French Guiana, near South America. The island was a part of the controversial French penal colony of French Guiana from 1852 to 1953. In its time, it was the most famous for its use for internal exile of political prisoners. The island, a tourist attraction today, albeit a bizarre one, is surrounded by rocky promontories and shoals, vicious ocean cross-currents and shark-infested waters. Landing on the island by boat in the day of Dr. Bougrat (mid-1927 when he arrived) remained so treacherous that prison officials had constructed a cable car system to connect the island to the nearby Île Royale, and used it for years to travel the two hundred yard wide channel between the two islands.

The most famous political prisoner on Devil's Island, as is well known, was Captain Alfred Dreyfus, and while political prisoners were common in the penal colony, it was a destination mostly for the most

hardened, violent and unsavory of the French criminal class. Conditions were brutal and prisoner-on-prisoner violence was common. Tropical diseases were rife and mosquitos — big blood-thirsty fat ones — were everywhere. To say the least, the place was appropriately named.

The penal colony had been functioning with the flotsam of the French underworld for more than a century. Very few men who were sentenced there were ever seen again in Europe. But Dr. Bougrat, reluctantly pushing Andrea out of his mind now, had plans other than dying in one of the most miserable places on the planet.

On Devil's Island, Doctor Bougrat quickly became a model prisoner. And almost as quickly, he became the prison doctor.

Bougrat studied his predicament and put on his thinking cap. Here he was surrounded by water on one side with squalor, disease and violence all around him on the other sides. His only real asset was his medical degree. He went to work on a plan to get out of there.

One day a few weeks after arrival Bougrat was in the prison hospital administering to a man who had been stabbed overnight in his cell.

"This man has outsmarted all of you," Bougrat mused to the head of the guards.

"How's that?"

"He's going to die from loss of blood. So he'll never have to serve his sentence here. In death, he escapes you."

The guard shrugged.

"What else can we do?" he asked.

"If I could have treated him last night, I could have closed the wounds and saved him. Then he might have had to serve another twenty years."

A few weeks later, Bougrat was moved out of his nighttime cell and into a small hut on the island so that he could be on duty round the clock. Since there was presumably no escaping, letting him have his liberty at night — and being on call as a doctor — would do no harm, the prison administration theorized. Bougrat had also already proven himself to be an engaging soul, so no one begrudged him his hut or an occasional evening stroll.

Almost immediately, Bougrat started putting his night time hours to good use: building a makeshift boat out of timber and various garbage he found in the prison. And at the same time he ingratiated himself with a small team of some the strongest men in the colony.

Then, nineteen months after he had begun his sentence, he was given the privilege sometimes awarded to trusted long-termers: a month's freedom in the town of St. Laurent-du-Maroni on the French Guinea mainland. There he was kept under surveillance by the police,

but not the kind of surveillance that couldn't be outwitted.

One night, in a house of prostitution, history began to repeat itself. Bougrat met a prostitute named Annette duBois, the closest thing he had ever seen to Andrea Audibert. She was thirty and the doctor was forty-four and they were quickly in love with one another.

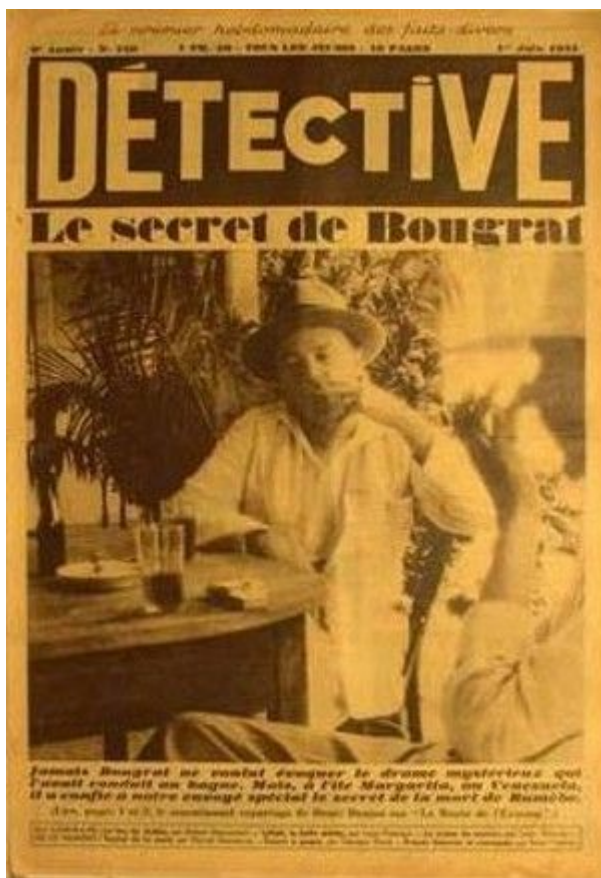
A few nights before he was to be returned to Devil's Island, Bougrat decided not to go back. Annette put up some money and they quickly spread it around. Next thing anyone knew, Bougrat's little raft, equipped with a sail, had arrived at the shore along with seven burley prisoners from the penal colony to act as a crew.

And then he took off on August 30, 1928.

They began a sea journey that has become part of French prison folklore, encountering high winds, currents, storms and a dozen days when they were marooned on a mud bank. But eventually the boat found its way northward along the coast and eventually up the Orinoco River and into Venezuela. He eventually landed at the little town of Iripa. As fate would have it, the town was in the middle of an epidemic of dengue fever a nasty mosquito-borne tropical disease caused by the dengue virus. There had already been fatalities.

Bougrat knew when he needed to go to work. He offered his expertise in medicine and treated patients with boundless dedication, although he was hit himself by the disease. He threw himself into his work for months, refusing to send for Annette until the epidemic had died down.

Meanwhile, French authorities had learned of his whereabouts and demanded his extradition, as well as those of his breakaway companions. But there was no extradition treaty between the two countries at the time. Pictures and stories began to appear in the French press about the dissolute doctor who had been condemned to Devil's Island but was now living openly in South America.



Venezuela at the time was governed by an ornery strongman named Juan Vicente Gomez. His rule was absolute for decades and he was particularly cunning about juggling relations at home and abroad. But Gómez was also busy on other fronts. He never married but he had two beautiful mistresses by whom he had sixteen children. Gómez also fathered many other children in brief relationships, somewhere between sixty and ninety. So the strongman didn't have a lot of time to ponder requests from distant foreign governments. Thus he decided that he would return the other escapees (some having had the stupidity to commit various new crimes) to French authorities. But Bougrat, the busy medical man, the emerging local hero, was useful. He could stay. Thereupon, Dr. Bougrat sent for Annette whom he eventually married.

Bougrat quickly learned that there was a shortage of physicians in Caracas. So he and Annette got married and set up a home, on her money, in the capital. Bougrat applied for a license to practice. The medical authorities in Venezuela declined to let him work in the capital but had no problem with him working out in the remote

hinterlands. So Dr. Bougrat took a new look around for a soft landing.

He found one soon. Fully integrated in the country, now proficient in Spanish, married with two daughters, he settled in Margarita Island, a pleasant place off the mainland not too far from Caracas. He opened a small private hospital in the community of Juan Griego, never refusing to treat the needy for free. Comfortably, he sat out the Great Depression of the 1930's as well as World War Two. Bougrat, with his sex problems solved right in his own home, didn't do any chasing in Venezuela. His mind on his work, he soon gained the respect of his professional colleagues.

He also never stopped protesting his innocence of murder. He may have been guilty of many things back in France, he insisted, but killing his friend Rumèbe was not one of them.



(Dr. Bougrat in Venezuela with child believed to be his daughter, circa 1930.)

Eventually, those back in France began to listen. After the Second World War, he received a pardon and was invited to return. But he insisted that he had found happiness in South America and there was

no need for a pardon since he hadn't done what he had been convicted of. If his conviction had been set aside, it would have been one thing, he said. But a pardon was not something he would accept. Nor was he interested in leaving his remote island paradise. There he was known as "the miracle doctor" whom God had sent to look after the poor.



So he stayed on his island for thirty-eight years. He lived modestly but comfortably with his family and surrounded by an adoring community. He died in his new home in 1962 at the age of seventy-two.

Eight years later in 1970, a local committee of Venezuelans erected a monument on his tomb. The monument endures to this day, almost a full century after Dr. Bougrat's Jekyll-Hyde existence in the south of France. Fresh flowers appear on the tomb in perpetuity, continuing remembrances from the people of Juan Griego whom Dr. Bougrat served in the better years of his life.



*And now, a bonus track...*

# THE CASE OF ARSENIC, OLD LACE AND SISTER AMY ARCHER

The eerie sound of the hearse creaking to a stop in front of The Archer Home for old folks and chronic invalids in the ink-black pre-dawn hours of the steaming August night awakened the two old maids who lived in the snug brick house across the street.

“Heavens!” said Mabel Bliss to her sister, Patricia, as she drew the bedroom curtain aside and peered out. “That’s the third time somebody’s died over there in less than a month! And always in the middle of the night.”

A light went on in the vestibule of The Archer Home and the front door opened to admit two burly men who had jumped down from the driver’s seat of the death wagon, opened the rear door and dragged out a box six feet long. They weren’t inside very long when they reappeared with the box, which seemed to be more of a burden to carry now. They shoved it into the hearse and clattered into the gloom.

Now a light went on in the parlor and the Bliss sisters could see Sister Amy Archer, founder of the home bearing her name, wearing nothing but a very fancy nightgown, settling herself at a little organ. (The “Sister” was a title she had bestowed on herself. It had nothing to do with any religious order.) The windows were open and presently there wafted across the narrow street the sweet sad strains of *Nearer, My God, To Thee*, accompanied by Sister Amy’s pleasant soprano.

Sister Amy Archer, one of the few arch-murderess in criminal history who could quote passages from the Bible from Genesis to Exodus, was only half way through the hymn when a second figure appeared, a brooding giant of a man with a red puffy face and walrus moustache, in nightshirt and bare feet. This was Big Jim Archer, Sister Amy’s fifth spouse, a coarse type in his forties who seemed to be an odd sort of a mate for our heroine. Sister Amy, though in her late thirties, looked a good decade younger, and, though sharp-featured, was a very attractive little woman with snow-white skin, jet-black hair and a divine form that even the starch in her professional uniform simply couldn’t hide. Not that she was hiding much that August night after the hearse left, nor was Big Jim hid-ing anything, either, when the music stopped and the lights went out.

It was Sister Amy’s views on sex that puzzled the Bliss sisters. For somebody who was so devout and stern, and who was so unalterably opposed to alcohol and tobacco in any form, Sister Amy was simply mad about sex. Nor did she make any bones about it.

“One man in bed at night when the lights are out,” she had said to the Bliss sisters after coming up from New York six months previously to found The Archer Home in an abandoned rich man’s mansion in the tree-shaded village of Windsor, just outside of Hartford, Connecticut, “is worth ten on the street in broad daylight.”

After breakfast in the morning, when the twenty residents of The Archer Home, assorted widows and widowers who were, in one way or another, breaking up and coming apart at the joints, were out on a veranda that swept across the front and ran around one side of the big gray frame ram-shackle Home, Big Jim clumped across the street and knocked on the front door of the Bliss house. Sister Amy, a simply superb cook, had sent him over with some of her hotcakes and maple syrup. He was both a comic and tragic figure, Big Jim, none too bright, and turned out in brown derby, baggy light-brown suit and heavy black shoes.

“We see you lost another one during the night, Jim,” said Mabel Bliss.

“Yeah,” said Big Jim, “another heart case.”

“That’s what the other two died from, isn’t it, Jim?”

“Yeah. It’s gettin’ to be a regular epidemic.”

“They always seem to die during the night, don’t they?”

“Yeah, don’t they! Well, I gotta to be goin’.”

Six nights later, that hearse was there again, and in the morning, Big Jim was over with something tasty from Sister Amy for the two spinsters.

“Who was it this time, Jim?” asked Mabel Bliss.

“A woman. First woman we’ve lost.”

“What was it this time, Jim?”

Big Jim, who had a flair for the dramatic gesture, didn’t reply with words but, raising his eyes toward the ceiling, pointed to his heart.

There were a total of three doctors who had staked out the village of Windsor in the year of 1908, all driving up from their offices in Hartford. None of the three, luckily enough for Sister Amy, was a wizard in the field of diagnostics. And, since all of the deaths in the Home were sudden, and in the dead of the night, none of the physicians was ever able to be at the bedside when the Grim Reaper appeared. It was never until morning, when the corpse was already embalmed, that Sister Amy phoned one of the physicians to get his name on the death certificate.

“What was it, Sister Amy?” the doctor would inquire. The physician, realizing that Sister Amy had been a head nurse in New York’s Bellevue Hospital, where Big Jim had been an orderly, before coming to Connecticut, had such complete respect for Sister Amy’s

knowledge in the field of diagnostics, that he would never question her word when she said, "The heart," or, "A general breaking up due to the infirmities of age."

There were ten bedrooms for the residents of The Home, each a double, and the residents, who averaged sixty years of age or more, which was old age in that period, were kept equally divided as to sex, so that there could always be two residents in each room. Sister Amy's deal was a unique one for the day: one lump of money or property, anywhere from \$5,000 to \$15,000, depending on the resident's age, physical condition and what the fiscal traffic would bear. For that sum, the resident was to receive a lifetime contract from Sister Amy, including everything from food and lodging and medical care, with a fine plot in Windsor's leading cemetery thrown in as a cheerful after-death bonus.

"I'm going to take such good care of my charges," Sister Amy told the Bliss sisters shortly after founding The Home, and explaining her plan, "that they'll be eating me into the poor house, praise the Good Lord!"

The Archer Home had been functioning for about a year and a half, and that hearse had been there in the night nine-teen times, when Big Jim Archer, who did all the chores around the place, from emptying the bedpans to sweeping up, began to feel himself breaking up. There was a fine Irish saloon, Paddy's, just three blocks from The Home and Big Jim, despite Sister Amy's strict ban on booze, began to sneak around to it when he got the chance. After a few shots, he'd pop some cloves into his mouth.

As time went on, Paddy, a discerning man, saw that Big Jim was beset by troubles of some sort and one night he asked him just what was wrong.

Big Jim, wiping the foam from a beer chaser from his walrus moustache, looked levelly at Paddy for a little while. Then he said, in a voice filled with sorrow:

"It's my wife, Paddy."

"Sister Amy? Why, is she ill or somethin'?"

"Far from that, my friend."

"What is it, then?"

Big Jim looked around him to make sure none of the other men at the bar were within earshot, then said,

"It's her demands at night."

"You mean they're more than you can handle, Jim?"

"More than I can handle now. I used to be able to handle things fine but her demands have increased since we came up here from New York."

"If I'm not asking too much, Jim, just how great are her

demands?"

"Two and three times."

"A week?"

"No, a night."

"Good God, Jim, that's enough to put a man in an early grave!"

As the months wore on, and that hearse continued to stop at The Archer Home on an average of once a month, always at night, Jim continued to confide in Paddy. He was now patronizing a quack doctor down in New York, who was fix-ing him up with an aphrodisiac. The pills worked for a time. Then one night Jim appeared in Paddy's with simply woeful tidings.

"The old clock," he confided to his friend, "has not only run down, it's stopped altogether."

"You mean...?"

"The very worst," said Big Jim, almost breaking into a fit of sobbing, "has happened."

"And Sister Amy? Is she complainin'?"

"That's just it," came the reply. "She don't say nothin' when we go to bed and I lay there useless. In the mornin', when it's daylight, she has a funny way of lookin' at me. I'd give a year of my life to know what's goin' on in that mind of hers. There's an awful lot about Sister Amy that I could tell you if I wanted to."

One day, when Jim was sweeping out the dirt at the back door, there appeared a redheaded, baggy-pants stranger carrying a knapsack on a stick over his shoulder.

"The name's Gilligan, Michael Gilligan," he announced to Big Jim in a deep, cheerful voice, "and I'm lookin' for work."

"There's no work here for you," snapped Big Jim, who was later to tell Paddy that instinct told him that, what with his dried-up condition, Gilligan would be a dangerous man to have around his wife. "Beat it. And beat it quick."

Big Jim had just ordered Gilligan off the property when he was conscious of Gilligan's eyes meeting those of somebody who had come up silently behind him. Turning, he saw Sister Amy. She was looking straight at the stranger, tall, hand-some, and obviously bursting with what it took when the lights were out. He shuddered, he was to tell Paddy that night, for he hadn't seen Sister Amy with that light in her eyes since the first time she had laid eyes on him.

Within an hour, Michael Gilligan, having been fed enough for three men by Sister Amy, who overruled her spouse in important matters, was addressing himself to assorted repair chores around The Home.

It was less than a month after Gilligan had first appeared that Sister Amy dropped in on the Bliss sisters one morning far from her

usual bubbling self.

“What on earth’s wrong, Sister Amy?” asked Mabel Bliss.

“Jim.”

“Jim? Why, what’s the matter with Jim?”

“He’s not long for this world, may the Lord bless his soul.”

“But just what’s wrong with the man?”

“Complications.”

The Christmas season was coming on, nearing the end of the third year of Sister Amy’s functioning in Windsor, when the hearse called in the night and took Big Jim Archer away. Sister Amy appeared to be inconsolable... for a while. Then she appeared to brighten very suddenly. The Bliss sisters couldn’t figure out what was up until spring came and the windows were open.

Then, on those occasions when Sister Amy forgot to douse the lights, the two old maids could see history repeating itself, with one exception. When Archer had divested himself of his nightshirt he had been clothed only in his birthday suit. Gilligan, though, no matter whether he was vertical or horizontal, never seemed to divest himself of his socks and garters.

It was in early summer that Sister Amy bounced over to the Bliss place one morning with the news: “My heart has been broken since Jim was called to Heaven but now Michael Gilligan has mended it. It is God’s will that Michael and I become one.”

Gilligan and Sister Amy got married by a local Justice of the Peace but were too busy with various matters to go off on a honeymoon. Gilligan wasn’t the friendly type to the Bliss sisters that Archer had been. And he seemed to drink a bit, always having a pint in his pants pockets as he roamed the property making repairs.

Sister Amy explained to the Bliss sisters why she made an exception to liquor in Gilligan’s case. “My Michael,” she said, “uses alcohol for medicinal purposes.”

One morning, after the second stiff in forty-eight hours had been carried away in the night, Gilligan was out front sweep-ing the porch when the sisters, who couldn’t stand the suspense, decided to call over to him.

“What’d the last two residents die of, Mr. Gilligan?” asked Mabel.

Gilligan stopped to take a swig out of the bottle before answering. Then he bellowed out, loudly enough to be heard in the next block:

“None of yer goddam business!”

That, as it was eventually to turn out, was a mistake. The Bliss sisters furious. They sat down and got off a letter to *The Hartford Courant*, then, as today, a great New England newspaper. They had been counting the number of people who left in that box during the night for more than four years now and it added up to one a month.

“I think,” the letter to *The Courant* concluded, “that that’s a lot of people dying and that there is something mighty strange going on over there.”

The next day there popped up at the Bliss front door a very appropriately named man named Mike Toughy, the youthful star reporter of *The Courant*, a walking, talking symbol of the front page scribes of the era: battered hat, dangling cigarette, whisky breath and side-of-the-mouth talk.

“And now,” he began, as he settled himself on a green chair in the Bliss parlor, “suppose you tell me just why you ladies are so suspicious of that place across the street.”

The Bliss sisters didn’t have anything to impart to Mike but suspicion. But, as they went into details about that hearse that had been calling in the night all those years, there was something so earnest about them that Mike decided to look into things. So he dug into the records of a few of Sister Amy’s recent losses, got the names of the three physicians who had signed the death certificates, and sought out the doctors.

True, all three doctors told Toughy, an average of a death a month at The Archer Home did, at first glance, seem high, considering that such an average would completely decimate the Home and repopulate it every twenty months. But the doctors pointed out to Mike that Sister Amy’s patients were all breaking up from the infirmities of age when they came to The Home and had a short time to live at best. Then, too, all three doctors pointed out, Sister Amy, having come out of Bellevue Hospital with practically as much knowledge of the human system as a physician, was more than capable of seeing that everything possible was done for any of her charges.

Toughy wasn’t satisfied, though. He had a friend who was an actuary, one of those statistics wizards who figure out how long people are going to live, employed by The Greater New England Life Insurance Company, and he dropped in on the man. After filling him in on the death rate at Sister Amy’s establishment, he made some notes, and asked Mike to come back in a few days.

The news that awaited Mike was mixed. The death rate was high, but, considering the condition of Sister Amy’s charges when they checked in, a lot was accounted for.

“So,” concluded the actuary, a good man with double talk, “the picture doesn’t look all black and it isn’t all white, either.”

Mike Toughy didn’t do anything now but hire a couple of grave diggers and an intern from Hartford General Hospital, dig up one of Sister Amy’s most recent check-outs, take the man’s insides out, put him back and cover the grave. Then Mike took the insides to the state

toxicologist right in Hartford. The news from the toxicologist wasn't what Mike was after: not the slightest trace of any kind of poison. Mike, the persistent one, dug up a second stiff but got the same kind of a report. A third stiff got him nowhere, nor did a fourth.

Mike had just gone back to the city room of his newspaper after getting his fourth negative report when who telephoned him but Sister Amy.

"Mr. Toughy," came the sweet voice of the lady who mixed sex and murder, "I'm wondering if you can stop over to see me as soon as you can."

Sitting in Sister Amy's parlor half an hour later, Toughy found himself looking at a very confident lady.

"Well, Mr. Toughy," she began, smiling sweetly, "were you disappointed?"

"Disappointed? Disappointed at what?"

"Disappointed," said Sister Amy, her voice taking on some harshness now, "at not finding any poison in the four bodies."

For once, Mike couldn't come up with an answer.

"No wonder you can't answer me," said Sister Amy, her voice now dripping icicles, "you no good son of a bitch. Dig up one more body and try to blacken my fine reputation and I'll see that you wind up in jail and, besides, I'll sue that paper of yours for the last desk in that room where you write your lies."

Mike had no sooner returned to the city room when the city editor beckoned him.

"Mike," said the city editor, "I can guess what Sister Amy said to you."

"Why?"

"She's hired the sharpest shyster lawyer this side of the Rockies, a scoundrel from New York, and he's just been in here threatening the very future of this paper."

"Anything else?" Toughy asked.

"Yes. This: maybe that woman is one of the greatest criminals since Bluebeard. But if she is, we'll never prove it. Let the law find out and dig into the facts. Drop this thing."

Mike Toughy, though, was practically fearless. On his days off, he ran down to New York and began to poke around Bellevue Hospital. There was a coffee house near Bellevue where the doctors, interns and nurses hung out. It was from a young physician who had been an intern when Sister Amy had been a nurse who gave Toughy some idea of Sister Amy's sexual demands.

"I've had quite a few women in my life," the doctor told the scribe, "but never anybody to come anywhere near Amy Archer. I know for a fact that she had three other fellows besides myself one

day when she was here within a twelve-hour period.”

Gilligan seems to have been a very talented man, for as long as he was to last. On most nights, he preferred to perform with the lights on and the shades up in a front room of the second floor. The Bliss sisters, with that wonderful show going on, lost so much sleep that they were seldom awake during the day. Every month or so, in the middle of the night, there would be a change of scene: that hearse.

It hadn't taken Gilligan long, of course, to become some-thing of a fixture at Paddy's saloon. Being a boastful man, he regaled Paddy and some of the barflies of stories of why Big Jim Archer had failed as a husband and why he himself was such a success, going into all the details.

Then one night, some three years after his marriage to Sister Amy, Gilligan walked into Paddy's a man with terror in his face.

“Good God, Mike,” said Paddy, “you look like you've seen a ghost.”

“It's worse than that, Paddy. I've just seen somebody *makin'* a ghost.”

“Whadda you mean?”

Gilligan had been hitting it up before he came into Paddy's and was about two sheets to the ozone. Now, though, as if suddenly realizing that he had let out something that should never have been mentioned, he clammed up. Looking at a shot Paddy had poured for him, he shoved it back, without a word, and hustled out of the joint.

“I wonder what he meant by what he just said?” one of the barflies could hear Paddy muttering to himself. Paddy thought for a while, then shrugged and went back to pouring booze for the customers.

Two nights later, that hearse was at Sister Amy's again. When Paddy's opened in the morning, the word was there be-fore the first spigot was turned on: Brother Gilligan had conked out during the night. Heart attack.

Sister Amy, always a lady who looked ahead, had Gilligan's successor all lined up, a classy-looking gentleman answering to the name of Harold Q. Knight, who had been in residence for several months now.

Knight was a smallish man of about fifty, with very white skin, very red lips, and jet black hair that the other residents were certain had been dyed. Nobody knew where he had come from and, as he passed the other residents at any hour of the day or night, he was always quot-ing to himself from a book of poetry he carried.

On the night of the day that Sister Amy's seventh husband had been buried, one of the residents, a new arrival named Charles W. Andrews, happened to be passing Sister Amy's bedroom when he

heard the voices of Sister Amy and Harold Q. Knight.

"Why I asked you to come into my room," Andrews could hear Sister Amy saying to Knight, "was I thought maybe we could get together."

"I don't quite understand," Knight replied. There was silence, then Andrews heard Knight saying: "But why are you taking your nightgown off?"

"Can't you guess, Mr. Knight?"

"Why, no."

"I'm a woman," Sister Amy was saying, "and I no longer have a husband. You are a man and you do not have a wife. We can have a lot of fun together."

"Sister Amy," Knight said, "I thought you knew."

"Knew what?"

"That I prefer men to women." There was a stony silence. Then Andrews heard Sister Amy say in the terminology of the day,

"You mean you're a fairy?"

"Well," replied Knight, "I guess you can call it that."

It wasn't long afterward when Knight left in the night.

All this time, of course, Mike Toughy had been biting his nails and tearing out his hair because *The Hartford Courant*, not wanting to find itself without a press to print on, had admonished him to lay off Sister Amy. Sister Amy had, of course, cut down on that one-a-month hearse call. But the old boys and girls were still going away in the night.

Sister Amy, who had, up to now, as she began her seventh year operating The Home, always appeared in The Home starched out in a nurse's white uniform and appeared on the street in regular pedestrian attire. Now, though, for street wear, she appeared in the semi-religious garb of the Quaker, flowing gray cape and little gray bonnet. As she minced along the streets of Windsor, out purely for exercise and air, she was never without her Bible, glancing at it as she walked, then quoting it as she looked skyward with a holy light in her eyes.

Our girl sure knew what she was doing. Some citizens re-garded her as something of a nut. Others respected her as a devout little character. But nobody, nobody but Mike Toughy, had the slightest idea that she was one of the great killers of criminal history.

It was along about now that Sister Amy, in her middle forties, entered that phase that women call change of life. With the normal woman, sex becomes pretty important. With Sister Amy, the demand was out of this world. To make matters worse, there wasn't a stalwart male on the premises. So Sister began to pay for it. Windsor was filled with stalwart young workmen, plumbers and carpenters and jacks of all trades. So now there was always a leak that developed some-where

in The Home, after dark, and a plumber called to plug it up.

One day, Mike Toughy happened to be lifting a few in Paddy's saloon when who walked in but Charley Andrews, the old boy who had heard that dialogue between Sister Amy and the gay resident. Toughy and Andrews happened to fall into conversation and when Mike heard the story of how Knight had conked out so quickly after not being able to rise to Sister's demands, he began to throb with suspicion again.

So Mike Toughy, without his paper being any the wiser, decided to play for all or nothing. He scouted around Hart-ford until he found an old couple, smart folks in their sixties named Flanagan, and he coached them in the part they were to play in a lethal plot.

A few days later, then, Mr. and Mrs. Michael Flanagan appeared at the front door of The Archer Home.

"We're from Massachusetts," Flanagan said to Sister Amy, "and we've heard about your wonderful home."

"Come in," said Sister Amy. The Flanagans looked like prosperous people and Sister Amy sat there for quite a while, sizing them up and feeling them out. The Home, she divulged, was all filled but she'd be glad to put them on the waiting list.

"Oh," said Flanagan, uttering words that Toughy had put in his mouth, "isn't that too bad you can't take us right away. Now we'll have to hunt around for someplace else because we want to get into a Home somewhere right away."

"Yes," piped up Mrs. Flanagan. "And money is no object."

The Flanagans were to say later that that crack of the little woman's was like throwing fuel on a dying fire.

"Oh," said Sister Amy, "I just remembered: there will be two vacancies here in a week or so."

"Oh? You have residents who are very ill?"

"Yes. Two cases of heart trouble, poor souls."

"Are they very ill?"

"They're unaware of what's wrong with them, God bless them."

"We'll be back," said Flanagan. "We're staying with relatives down in New York."

When the Flanagans told Toughy about the vacancies, Mike was afraid he'd have two murders on his conscience. So he had the Flanagans go right back and tell Sister Amy they'd changed their minds.

Unbeknown to Mike, though, there was another couple, people named the Chester Watsons, who had popped up at the Bliss home, of all places, asking the two old maids what they knew about the Archer place

"We're looking for some place to spend our last years," Mrs.

Watson told Mabel Bliss, "and we've heard a lot about the Archer Home."

Mabel Bliss, having been told by Mike Toughy that Sister Amy would have the law on anybody who said a bad word about her, was afraid, unfortunately, as it turned out, to open her mouth. And so she and her sister saw the Chester Watsons walking across the street, rapping on the front door of The Home, and being graciously received by Sister Amy.

Two nights later, not one but two residents of The Archer Home left in boxes. One dead one was an old lady; the other was Brother Andrews.

And that did it, the double departure in the gloom of the night. There was room now for the Watsons. When the Bliss sisters dropped the word to Mike Toughy, he got busy. Toughy had always thought that Sister Amy had learned about those four bodies he had had dug up by spotting him when he had visited the Bliss home originally and somehow having him shadowed when he went to the cemetery at nights. Now, though, he to take his chances.

The body that Toughy had disinterred this time, long enough to get out of the cemetery with the stomach, was that of Charley Andrews. Toughy was in better luck this time. Andrews had been poisoned.

The next day Mike Toughy was sitting in the office of State's Attorney Hugh M. Alcorn. Toughy had, while the state toxicologist had been analyzing Andrews' stomach, been doing some fast poking around the region. He learned that Sister Amy had insured Andrews for \$4,000. He learned that on the occasion that he had had the actuary look into the insurance records for him that the actuary had not looked far enough.

True, Sister Amy had not at that time been carrying insurance on any of the departed ones. Not that she hadn't tried. She had tried to take out policies on most of them but they had all failed to pass their medical tests.

But Toughy had discovered something even more vital to the future of The Archer Home. In digging into the poison books of the drugstores, which he had done previously without results, it occurred to him that Sister Amy might not have used her own name when buying arsenic. And he struck luck there, too. A little woman answering Sister Amy's description had, over a period of years, put in occasional appearances at a drug store in Hartford. And when Mike Toughy sneaked the druggist around to the Bliss house under cover of night and had him get a gander at Sister Amy when she came out the front door next morning, the druggist just nodded.

Now Toughy sat there telling State's Attorney Alcorn the whole

lethal story of Sister Amy's seven years of bad luck for Windsor. Alcorn saw the black light. But, to make as-surance doubly sure, he had the bodies of four of Sister's most recent victims dug up. Two of them were filled with arsenic. Two of them had been smothered. That answered a lot, that smothering; it explained why most of Sister Amy's victims were walking around after supper and leaving in a box a few hours later. And a smothering job didn't leave any trace in a victim's stomach.

Finally, The Hartford Courant ran the big story.

Mrs. Archer-Gilligan  
Arrested, Charged  
With Murder

# The Hartford Courant

Fair Today and  
Tomorrow  
Published at Year Old

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## POLICE BELIEVE ARCHER HOME FOR AGED A MURDER FACTORY

### MRS. ARCHER - GILLIGAN ACCUSED OF MURDER OF INMATE

### AUTOPSY SHOWS TWO WHO DIED WERE KILLED BY POISON

**U.S. ACCEPTS GERMAN PROMISE; NO CONDITION TO BE CONSIDERED**

Wilson, in Brief Note Cabled Last Night, Informs Berlin Government That Differences With Other Belligerents Cannot Form Subject of Discussion With Germany.

**FOUR MORE IRISH LEADERS EXECUTED**

Execution of four Irish leaders, charged with participation in the Easter rising, was carried out in Dublin yesterday.



Mrs. Gilligan, Arrested at Her Home Late Yesterday Afternoon, Withstands Grilling by State Police—Body of Franklin R. Andrews, Whom She is Accused of Killing, Disinterred from its Resting Place in Chelsea Cemetery at Night, Shows Death Was Caused by Arsenic, Not Gastric Ulcers, as Stated in Death Certificate—Another Body Also Shows Death by Poison.

**MAY BE 20 WHO HAVE BEEN POISONED**

Old Folks Have Come to the Home From All Parts of the State—Woman Has Had Two Husbands—Startling Number of Deaths at Home—Purchases of Arsenic at Windsor Drug Store—Woman Waives Examination—Bodies Taken Away at Night in Violation of Law

Charged with the murder of an inmate of her home for elderly people, and believed by the authorities to have poisoned many other inmates, Mrs. Amy E. Archer-Gilligan of Windsor was arrested late yesterday afternoon.

Sister Amy was charged with the murder-for-profit of Brother Andrews. A bad case of “prison psychosis” made it seem unlikely that she’d come to trial, but on June 18, 1917, the woman suspected of at least a score of murders faced the jury. After a four-week trial and four hours of deliberation, they found her guilty and sentenced her to die on the gallows in November. But State’s Attorney Alcorn, in his enthusiasm, had made a slip in the first trial and had told the jury about twenty-three other arsenic jobs that the State had linked to Sister Amy. That got her a new trial in June 1919.

At the second trial, a curious thing was noticeable. Sister Amy, though only in her forties, had suddenly lost her re-markable youth. At the first trial, where she had appeared with a daughter from one of the five marriages she had gone through before darkening the Connecticut landscape, she had retained her remarkable youth.

Now, though, she had sud-denly become an old woman, with evil written all over her face. She reminded some court observers of a female Jekyll-Hyde. All through the seven years while she was writing criminal history she had kept her innocent, youthful face. Now,

overnight, it seemed, the evil and age had wiped out the innocence and the youth.

Insanity was her defense the second time around, with defense lawyers declaring her crazy. Her 19-year-old daughter, Mary E. Archer, testified that her mother was a morphine addict. The second trial ended on July 1, 1919, with a plea of guilty of murder in the second degree, which carried a life sentence. She was a model prisoner until 1924, when she was declared hopelessly insane and transferred to a mental hospital.

End of story? Not quite.

An aspiring young writer heard of Amy's story in the 1930's and wrote it up as a stage play. His name was Joseph Otto Kesselring, and the original title of his work was *Bodies in Our Cellar*. The title changed, however, and the play found its way to Broadway as *Arsenic and Old Lace*.

Written in 1939, it opened on Broadway at the Fulton Theater, on January 10, 1941, to rave reviews. The original production featured Boris Karloff playing a killer who looked like the Boris Karloff of *Frankenstein* fame and made the idea of wholesale slaughter simply hilarious.

Frank Capra later made it into a film, starring Cary Grant. As one critic proclaimed,

"You wouldn't believe homicidal mania could be such fun!"

Sister Amy was still alive for both the play and the movie. But it is not known if she saw either. Nonetheless, she starred in the original cast and became a celebrity patient, of sorts, in the nut house where she resided. Ironically, she outlived just about everyone she ever met until a day April 1962, when she died quietly at the ripe old age of ninety two.

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| <b><i>THE END</i></b> |
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